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'The Hobbit' and Other Fiction by J. R. R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language.

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THE HOBBIT AND OTHER FICTION BY J.R.R.
TOLKIEN: THEIR ROOTS IN MEDIEVAL
HEROIC LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE.

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The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien:
Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in

The Department of English

by
William Howard Green
B.A., Auburn University, 1963
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Abstract

The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language

J.R.R. Tolkien is a professional scholar specializing in Old and Middle English philology and has demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Old Norse. A review of works cited in his essay "On Fairy-stories" reveals that he is well read in traditional fantasy and is especially familiar with Celtic fairy tales and with the stories involving King Arthur. The body of this study presents the results of a survey of certain major medieval works in English, Norse, Irish, Welsh, French, German, and Italian, particularly those alluded to in Tolkien's published scholarship and those suggested as possible sources in reviews of Tolkien's fiction. The main concern is with motifs and characters in The Hobbit which seem to echo those in works of medieval heroic literature, but particular attention is given to motifs which also occur in The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien's major fictional effort to date.

The basis for the organization of this study is the division of The Hobbit into four parts, each of them beginning with a journey into the wilderness and ending with rest and reprovisioning in a house. Because most names of characters and places are introduced in the first part of The Hobbit, the discussion of that part would be overlong if it also treated derivations of names. Therefore, following an initial chapter examining previous criticism and a second chapter developing the four-part structure of The Hobbit, there is a third chapter devoted only to the sources of Tolkien's names in medieval languages, particularly

in Old English and Old Norse.

The next four chapters discuss medieval analogues to characters, objects, and events in The Hobbit. The general organizational principle, occasionally modified to treat related motifs together, is to discuss a thing in the chapter which treats that part of The Hobbit in which it is most prominent. For instance, since trolls appear only in the first part, they are discussed in Chapter IV, and the magic ring is discussed in Chapter V, the chapter treating that part of The Hobbit in which it is found and its power discovered. Main topics in Chapter IV will be Wizards, Trolls, and Elvish Blades; in Chapter V, Rings, Riddles, Shrieks, and Skin-Changeers; in Chapter VI, Woods, Water, Elves, and Delvings; in Chapter VII, Deserts, Dragons, and Dragon Hoards.

This study confirms in detail Tolkien's indebtedness to medieval heroic literature and demonstrates some of the nature of that indebtedness. Though mainly indebted to Norse and English works, particularly Beowulf, the two Eddas, and the sagas which include mythological elements, Tolkien does make use of many elements appearing in the Irish tales of Cuchulain, the Fianna, and the Tuatha de Danaan and in the Arthurian romances of Chrétien, Wolfram, and Malory. Many motifs in his fiction also occur in the Italian romantic epics of Ariosto and Tasso, works not chronologically medieval but fed by a living medieval tradition.

The Hobbit incorporates elements from a wide range of medieval literature, but its deepest roots are in Northern Europe; its world is essentially the world of Norse heroic fiction and of Beowulf.

Chapter One

Tolkien and Medieval Literature

The publication in 1937 of a "children's book" called The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien, professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College in Oxford, was the first non-scholarly appearance of an author whose extended fairy stories have earned critical respect in a century hostile to fantasy. Tolkien's success in legitimatizing the genre¹ owes much to the seeming reality and coherence of his "Middle-earth," a made-up world alive and sound because it grows out of something greater than itself, its roots deep in philological scholarship. The medieval roots were noticed by several early reviewers of The Hobbit and cited repeatedly in reviews and later criticism of its vast sequel, The Lord of the Rings, but no full-length survey of medieval sources seems to have been attempted. Such a survey, however incomplete, might argue Tolkien's solidity to those who, like Edmund Wilson,² seem to regard all modern fantasy as insubstantial; but more important, it should uncover some of the sources of Tolkien's genius to those who have already felt it, and cast a faint light into the creative process behind one of the century's most unusual works of fiction. Indications of medieval influences in Tolkien's stories may be found in criticism of the stories and in the life and scholarly writing of Tolkien himself.

¹ Lin Carter, Tolkien: A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings (New York, 1969), establishes (if, indeed, any argument is needed beyond a perusal of paperback books in a drugstore) that Tolkien writes in a thriving genre. Books of prose fantasy are almost as common as critical attention to them is rare.

² "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" Nation, CLXXXII (April 14, 1956), 312-314.

THE CRITICS

Though Tolkien reportedly began The Hobbit for the amusement of his children, he denies that it was especially intended for young readers,³ and its extensive sale in the Ballantine paperback edition (without illustrations) demonstrates appeal to a wider audience. Released as a juvenile, The Hobbit received little critical attention. It was usually given only brief consideration along with other contemporary juvenilia and, though widely recommended, was reviewed with too much concern for whether it had pictures and would please children of a certain age. The Hobbit's adult popularity was foreshadowed in the delight with which some reviewers professed reading it and in occasional doubts that it would be understood by children. One reviewer is, she says, tempted to say that, if the book does not please American children, "so much the worse for them."⁴ The London Times Literary Supplement remarks that, though the book will amuse younger readers, only adults reading it repeatedly "will begin to realize what deft scholarship and profound reflection have gone to make everything in it so ripe, so friendly, and in its own way so true."⁵ It was no secret that a professor of Anglo-Saxon had written The Hobbit, but only Richard Hughes among early reviewers seems to have glimpsed the depth and kind of scholarship behind it. His review is confined to a column under the heading, "Books for Pre-Adults"; but Tolkien's book apparently made him uneasy about this

³ Current Biography Yearbook, 1967, pp. 416-417.

⁴ M.L. Becker, "Books for Young People," New York Herald Tribune Books, February 20, 1938, p. 7.

⁵ "A World for Children" (anon. rev.), October 2, 1937, p. 714.

classification, for he begins with a discussion of the difficulty of assigning a work's appeal to a specific age group,⁶ a point very similar to the one made a year later in Tolkien's Andrew Lang Lecture, On Fairy-stories.⁷ Mr. Hughes notes that Tolkien is "so saturated in his life-study that it waters his imagination with living springs." The Hobbit is "Nordic mythology" rewritten by a man so saturated in it that he does not merely re-arrange, but "contributes to it at first hand," writing a new story fed by traditional materials.⁸ Over a decade was to pass until, after the publication of The Lord of the Rings, more attention was paid to the "living springs" which water Tolkien's fiction and the process whereby philological scholarship, however deft, became modern fiction.

Early reviews of The Lord of the Rings immediately recognized the medieval background. Donald Barr's review notices that Tolkien's knowledge of Germanic epic traditions lends his story "a kind of echoing depth . . . wherein we hear Snorri Sturluson and Beowulf, the sagas and the Nibelungenlied, but civilized by the gentler genius of Modern England."⁹ Michael Straight observes Tolkien's preparation in "Welsh, Norse, Gaelic, Scandinavian and Germanic folklore";¹⁰ and Edmund Wilson's caustic review holds against Tolkien his own state-

⁶New Statesman and Nation, XIV (Dec. 4, 1937), 944.

⁷J.R.R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (Boston, 1965), pp. 33-46. This volume is reprinted, in reduced type but without changes in pagination, in The Tolkien Reader (New York, 1966).

⁸Hughes, p. 944.

⁹New York Times Book Review, May 1, 1955, p. 4.

¹⁰"The Fantastic World of Professor Tolkien," The New Republic, CXXXIV (Jan. 16, 1956), 24.

ment that the long story is "largely an essay in linguistic aesthetic."¹¹ Neither W.H. Auden's enthusiastic article¹² nor Mark Robert's cold one¹³ evinces awareness of the work's scholarly foundations. Only Douglass Parker specifically indicates some of the English, Norse, and Celtic echoes he hears; and, in one long footnote, publishes more elucidation of medieval linguistic data behind Tolkien's character and place-names than anyone else in the 'fifties.¹⁴ The success of The Hobbit, Parker believes, is due in part to Tolkien's ability "to fashion his wide knowledge of Northern antiquity into a real situation."¹⁵ In The Lord of the Rings he "has rewritten, or rather recreated, Beowulf."¹⁶

Three years later, in 1959, Patricia Meyer Spacks, calls Tolkien "a great modern myth-maker"¹⁷ and defends his prodigious inhuman villains by referring to his celebrated essay on Beowulf and comparing them to the monsters in that poem: the defense, she suggests, "of the Anglo-Saxon poem's structural dependence on encounters with non-human monsters . . . could stand equally well for Tolkien's own

¹¹Wilson, p. 312.

¹²"At the End of the Quest, Victory," New York Times Book Review, January 22, 1956, p. 5.

¹³"Adventures in English," Essays in Criticism, VI (Jan. 1956), 50-59.

¹⁴"Hwaet We Holbytla . . .," The Hudson Review, IX (Winter 1956-57), 605.

¹⁵Parker, p. 602.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 609.

¹⁷"Ethical Patterns in The Lord of the Rings," Critique, Studies in Modern Fiction, III (Spring-Fall 1969), 30.

fiction."¹⁸ And she makes the obvious identification of Tolkien's "Unknown West" with Arthur's Avalon.¹⁹ William Blissett's "The Despots of the Rings " contributes to the discussion by comparing Tolkien's stories with Wagner's operas.²⁰ He anticipates the fuller discussions of George H. Thomson²¹ and Lin Carter²² by defining The Lord of the Rings as a "heroic romance"; and, noting Tolkien's lifelong study of medieval fiction and history, concludes that he has produced "the last literary masterpiece of the Middle Ages."²³ Because Wagner based his Ring and Parsifal largely on Old Norse writings, the list of Tolkien-Wagner parallels substantially catalogues parallels between Tolkien and the Norse. Indeed, Blissett ascribes the parallels "to Tolkien's immersion in medieval lore and to his possession, like Wagner, of a mytho-poetic imagination, and not necessarily to any direct Wagnerian influence, though that is not to be precluded."²⁴

Robert J. Reilly's dissertation in 1960,²⁵ Marjory Evelyn

¹⁸Spacks, 31.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 38.

²⁰The South Atlantic Quarterly, LVIII (1959), p. 448-456.

²¹"The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VIII (Winter 1967), 43-59.

²²Carter, pp. 79-95.

²³Blissett, p. 449.

²⁴Ibid., p. 455.

²⁵"Romantic Religion in the works of Owen Barfield, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien," DA, XXI, 3461-62.

Wright's in 1961,²⁶ and W.R. Irwin's essay (1961)²⁷ consider Tolkien as a member of a "school" including Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis but generally agree that Tolkien does not resemble other members of the school as much as they resemble one another; and these essays add little to the present subject, for while Williams and Lewis do include medieval elements in their serious fiction, these elements are heavily theological or Arthurian and are transplanted into stories beginning or ending in modern realistic settings. Comparison with Williams and Lewis tends to obscure what are perhaps Tolkien's three outstanding characteristics: his creation of an independent, credible universe; his immersion in non-theological medieval Norse, English and Celtic materials; and his infusing stories with these materials in such a way that the material seems wholly at home, part of a seamless whole.

More recent commentary regularly recognizes the presence of medieval sources. Henry Resnik, who interviewed Tolkien (1966), writes:

Tolkien's long acquaintance with Norse and Germanic myths has inspired the chiller, more menacing landscapes of Middle-earth, and he makes no secret of having deliberately shaped the two major interests of his life--rural England and the northern myths--to his own literary purposes. 'In The Lord of the Rings,' Tolkien says, 'I have tried to modernize the myths and make them credible.'²⁸

²⁶"The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth: A Study in the Myth-Philosophy of Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien," DA, XXI, 3464-65.

²⁷"There and Back Again," Sewanee Review, LXIX (Autumn 1961), 566-78.

²⁸"The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," The Saturday Evening Post, July 2, 1966, p. 94.

The 1967 Current Biography paraphrases this passage, expanding the list of major interests to include "his love for words themselves . . . and medieval romance" (p. 415). It is natural that Ganna Ottevaere-Van Praag should notice particularly the French, German, and Italian parallels. Praising The Lord of the Rings as "un des oeuvres vraiment originales de ce siècle," he finds that the mood of this "vaste fresque épique en prose" places it in the tradition of the Old Celtic and Germanic legends ("Elle fait penser au cycle du Graal, aux Sagas et aux Nibelungen"), but the complexity of plot and the richness of invention recall Ariosto's Orlando Furioso.²⁹ Ottevaere-Van Praag develops the comparison further, finding a fusion of the Germanic and Romantic epics. Matthew Hodgart's "Kicking the Hobbit" (1967) expresses a disenchantment similar to Edmund Wilson's, but he is much better informed about sources. Doubting the acceptability of Tolkien's message or the legitimacy of much of his appeal, Hodgart states that the Men of Gondor and Riders of Rohan "are presented in a series of brilliant pastiches of medieval and Anglo-Saxon literature but remain wooden in their nobility or depravity." But he acknowledges that Tolkien draws "with immense skill" from the Iliad, the Eddas, Beowulf, the Irish epics of Cuchulain and the Tuatha de Danaan, the Mabinogion, the Chanson de Roland, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.³⁰ Other works mentioning but not fully discussing the medieval parallels include Noreen Hayes and Robert Renshaw's "Of Hobbits," which mentions a debt to "Scandi-

²⁹"Retour a L'épopée Mythologique: Le Maître des Anneaux de J.R.R. Tolkien," Révue des Langues Vivantes, XXXIII (1967), 237.

³⁰The New York Review of Books, May 4, 1967, p. 10.

navian and Teutonic myth,"³¹ and William Ready's disappointing Understanding Tolkien (p. 80) which adds little to Tolkien studies beyond historical information on Oxford life.

To date (Spring 1969), there have been three significant discussions devoted to Tolkien's medieval sources, all of them fairly recent: (1) George Thomson's "The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Literature," (2) J.S. Ryan's "German Mythology Applied--- The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory," and (3) Lin Carter's Tolkien: A Look Behind the Lord of the Rings. The Lord of the Rings, according to George H. Thomson, "is---so far as I know---the first attempt since the Renaissance to write a fully developed traditional romance."³² The matter of the story is "an anatomy of romance themes or myths;" its structure, like "a tapestry romance of the Medieval-Renaissance tradition."³³ The first part of Thomson's argument does not identify sources, but rather demonstrates that The Lord of the Rings contains main elements from each of the six phases of romance defined in Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism. The second part identifies the structure of Tolkien's story more with Spenser and Ariosto than with Malory. Thomson analyzes Tolkien's creative process, finding that he "was able to ransack the entire

³¹Critique, Studies in Modern Fiction, IX (1967), 58.

³²"The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VIII (Winter 1967), p. 44. Lin Carter's discussion shows that Tolkien's is not the first attempt, though perhaps first to receive serious attention: a fact due in part to the poverty of the genre since the Enlightenment, in part to a critical attitude hostile to fantasy.

³³Thomson, p. 44-45.

storehouse of early northern literature (mythology, fairy-tale, saga, epic), transmute its materials, . . . and combine them with the materials and conventions of romance;"³⁴ and he concludes that "The Lord of the Rings is a twentieth century Beowulf."³⁵

The major contribution to the study of names in Tolkien's fiction is J.S. Ryan's "German Mythology Applied--The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory."³⁶ Ryan introduces his concise catalogue of etymologies and parallels by asserting Tolkien's "considerable awareness of the residuum of association in words and names from the Germanic world" (p. 45). Though his fiction is moral in purpose, Tolkien makes such use of linguistic aesthetic that students of language enjoy tracing "the evocations of some of the special words and names." These evocations help give the stories "the dignity and remoteness needed to produce separation of the essential human soul and its general environment and condition" (p. 46). Briefly noticing ingredients in Tolkien's stories which seem drawn from medieval Celtic, German, Icelandic, and English literature and history, Ryan briskly but soundly explains the etymologies of Shelob, attercoop, Balrog, Bolg, Smaug, Arkenstone, mathom, Middle-earth, Gandalf, Gimli, Garm, ent, Fangorn, Orthanc, Saruman, Orc, Nazgul, Smeagol, Deagol, warg, Mordor, Hobbit, Goldberry, Sauron, Frodo, and the Red Book of Westmarch. Though some of these derivations were noticed by Parker, and other students have, no doubt, discovered them independently, Ryan's concise, learned and accurate explanations, conveniently gathered in one

³⁴Thomson, p. 58.

³⁵Ibid., p. 59.

³⁶Folklore, LXXVII (Spring 1966), pp. 45-59.

short article, are a valuable contribution. After listing recurrent themes from early medieval literature in Tolkien's fiction, Ryan suggests parallels between the "aristocratic Beowulfian twilight" of Tolkien's Third age which precedes the age of men, and the Germanic Heroic Age which preceded the Christian era in the North (p. 58). "The total achievement of Professor Tolkien in his mythical works is to re-interpret the ethos of the Heroic Age, to stress for the English the cyclic nature of history by an imaginative construct of the world before our own" (p. 58). Grounding his subcreation, like Beowulf, in Germanic myth and history and a consciousness of a Wyrd, or fate, ruling the world, Tolkien is "the most complex of modern myth-makers" (p. 59).

Tolkien: A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings, the only essential book so far about Tolkien, was written by Lin Carter, a fantasy writer and avowed lover of "old, old books nobody else bothers to read anymore" (p. 212). Though concerned with medieval sources in only part of three short chapters, Carter makes several interesting and original discoveries. There is little new in his comparison of Tolkien's fiction with versions of the Siegfried Legend, but discussions of the derivations of Earendil and Frodo are excellent. Interesting and, I think, accurate are his partial identification of Gandalf with Odin, and of the white Tree of Gondor with Yggdrasill. Carter's main purpose is to define the fantasy tradition, both ancient and living, in which Tolkien writes, and it is on this subject that he is expert; but he still manages to document more parallels between Tolkien and medieval fiction than anyone except Ryan, who has a considerable scholarly advantage.

THE LIFE AND SCHOLARSHIP

At present the most reliable guides to the background of Tolkien's fiction are his own philological studies. They not only identify some medieval works he studied closely but emphasize the points which caught his imagination. There is a very close relationship between the fiction and the scholarship. It cannot be an accident, for instance, that in his prefatory remarks which first appeared in the 1940 edition of Hall's translation of Beowulf, published three years after The Hobbit and when The Fellowship of the Ring was already in progress, Tolkien selects, to exemplify poetic diction in Old English, the word beorn, which he explains meant both "warrior" and "bear."³⁷ This passage glosses Beorn in The Hobbit.³⁸ And when Gandalf, ordinarily a stooped old man, uncloaks his wizard's might early in The Fellowship (I, 60),³⁹ we are shown the meaning of ēacen, which Tolkien selects to demonstrate the imprecision of translation. Rendered as "stalwart," "broad," "huge," and "mighty" by Hall, OE ēacen means "not 'large' but 'enlarged', and in all cases may imply not merely size and strength, but an addition [underlining Tolkien's] of power, beyond the natural."³⁹ And guided by this hint, we may notice passages suggesting supernatural ēaca throughout The Lord of the Rings, certainly involving Gandalf, the Nazguls, Galadriel, Frodo, and even

³⁷ "Prefatory Remarks" to John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, rev. C.L. Wrenn (1967), p. xvii.

³⁸ Rev. ed. (New York: Ballantine Books Inc., 1968), pp. 118ff.

³⁹ Citations from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings are to the recent and inexpensive authorized paperback edition published by Ballantine Books, New York, 1965. The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, and The Return of the King will be cited by volume number rather than title.

Sam at the beginning of The Return of the King.⁴¹ The precise meaning and distribution of these Eacena are not the point here, but Eacen and beorn demonstrate that his fiction embodies certain scholarly points which interested him and, conversely, that his scholarship may help explicate his fiction.

Before Tolkien's publications are reviewed, it should be noted that studies published under his name do not represent the limits of his scholarship, much less of his reading. William Ready quotes a statement from one of Tolkien's pupils: "He took endless pains with his students, helped them so much that work they published--he published very little himself--was really his own. Yet he never took credit for this, only pleasure for his pupils."⁴² I will mention works which acknowledge Tolkien's help, but the list will not be complete and, even if it were, it would not define Tolkien's limits. Tolkien himself admits being influenced by H. Rider Haggard's She and, according to L. Sprague de Camp, "is one of those people who has literally read everything, and can converse intelligently on just about any subject."⁴³ This may only indicate coincidence of taste between Tolkien and another fantasy writer, but clearly Tolkien

⁴¹ These persons bear magic rings, and the list comes near to including all who do. Elrond, perhaps, is a ring-bearer without specific Eacan. As we never see Sauron physically, it may be said that his entire presence is malignant hugeness, supernatural increase in power. There are moments in The Lord of the Rings when other characters achieve something like Eaca (when Aragorn's kingship is revealed, when the ents become "hasty," and when Saruman weaves a temporary spell of rhetoric) but numinous manifestations of Eaca certainly occur throughout the story and are largely, perhaps exclusively, dependent on magic rings.

⁴² Understanding Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings (New York, 1969), p. 18.

⁴³ Quoted in Carter, p. 25.

is not confined to his academic field. The scholarship identifies some of his favorite haunts, but it must be remembered that one of his hobbies is taking long country rambles.

Born in 1892 in South Africa, Tolkien returned with his mother in 1896 to the village of Sarehole, near her native Birmingham, shortly before his father's death. When he was twelve his mother died, and under the guardianship of Father Francis Xavier Morgan, a Roman Catholic Priest, he attended King Edward VI School in Birmingham, receiving the B.A. degree from Exeter College, Oxford, in 1915. After service with the Lancaster Fusiliers in World War I, he obtained the M.A. degree at Oxford in 1919 and worked as an assistant on the Oxford English Dictionary before taking a post as reader in English Language at the University of Leeds in 1920. There he received a professorship and published A Middle English Vocabulary, his first important piece of scholarship.⁴⁴ The year 1925 saw both Tolkien's return to Oxford, where he was Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon until 1945, and the publication of the text of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Oxford), which he edited in collaboration with E.V. Gordon. That Tolkien's philological attentions were not limited to Early English is shown by an acknowledgement in E.V. Gordon's An Introduction to Old Norse (Oxford) published two years later: "For help in preparing the apparatus of the book I am indebted especially to Professor J.R.R. Tolkien, who read the proofs of the Grammar and made valuable suggestions and corrections" (p. ix). Before The Hobbit, Tolkien also published "Chaucer as a Philologist" (1934), and his cele-

⁴⁴ A Middle English Vocabulary (Oxford, 1922) designed for use with Kenneth Sisam's Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose.

brated "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936). By the time that Bilbo's story was published, its forty-five year old author, a professional philologist for almost twenty years, had so demonstrated acquaintance with Old Norse and Old and Middle English that we may feel sure no major correspondences between these areas and his fiction are wholly accidental.

After the initial success of The Hobbit, Tolkien divided his time between scholarship and fiction. He began immediately the sequel which was to become The Lord of the Rings, and for ten years seems to have published nothing; but we learn from the "Introductory Note" to Tree and Leaf (1965) that the essay, "On Fairy-stories," and the story "Leaf by Niggle," both published in 1947, were written eight years earlier when the author was only a few chapters into The Fellowship of the Ring. Written at the crucial point after his first success and "when The Lord of the Rings was beginning to unroll itself and to unfold prospects of labor and exploration in yet unknown country as daunting to me as to the hobbits,"⁴⁵ the essay reads like a theoretical defense of fantasy, the unfashionable genre to which Tolkien found himself committed. "On Fairy-stories" deserves particularly close attention because it is centered between The Hobbit and most of The Lord of the Rings, and because its broad subject allows Tolkien freedom to express his interests in his choice of illustrative examples. Not all are medieval. He mentions Shakespeare, Drayton, Swift, Stevenson, Lewis Carroll, Dickens, Thackeray, Chesterton, Barrie, Maeterlinck, and Milne and is familiar

⁴⁵ Tree and Leaf, p. vii.

with the fairy-stories of George MacDonald (three citations) and Andrew Lang (over a dozen), as well as the German, Norse, West Highland and Egyptian collections of Grimm, Dasent, Campbell, and Budge. Classical mythology is mentioned occasionally, and Biblical story is central to the conclusion. The relevance and interest of these diverse references suggest that they were selected by a man familiar with a much larger body of material.

Several references to Beowulf and to Middle English poetry are what would be expected from a man who has published scholarship in these areas. Mention of "the turning of the bear-boy into the knight Beowulf"⁴⁶ recalls Beorn and establishes an association between the skin-changer and the beorn who cleanses Heorot;⁴⁷ and mention of "Froda, King of the Heathobards,"⁴⁸ makes a connection, ironic or not, between the king and the hobbit. Writing Frodo's story during the same months that he wrote this passage, Tolkien cannot have failed to make the connection, and his discussion on the next page of the relationship between Froda's son Ingeld and the Norse fertility god Frey (the Lord) generates the cluster Frodo-Froda-Frey-Lord, which certainly existed in Tolkien's mind, whatever effect it may have had on his fiction. The citations of Chaucer and the Gawain poet are to be expected in view of previous scholarship. References to Gower and several anonymous ballads relate to medieval English conceptions of fairies as full-sized people with extraordinary beauty

⁴⁶ Tree and Leaf, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (Boston, 1950), l. 1024. Subsequent citations of Beowulf will be to this edition, indicated by line rather than page numbers.

⁴⁸ Tree and Leaf, p. 29.

and power. In a philological history of fairy-lore, Tolkien identifies the literary fairies related, and not related, to his elves, and blames Renaissance "rationalization" for reducing them to diminutive size.⁴⁹

Several major references in the essay to Old Norse and Celtic mythology, more than the total number to medieval English verse, confirm as does nothing else in his scholarly writing the great effect of these mythologies, and probably their vehicle languages, on Tolkien's mytho-poetic imagination. The only printed manifestation of his Old Norse studies before "On Fairy-stories" is the brief but telling acknowledgement that Tolkien "made valuable suggestions and corrections" concerning the Grammar in Gordon's An Introduction to Old Norse, p. ix. The passage on Frey discussed above includes mention of Odin's high seat,⁵⁰ which resembles "The Seat of Seeing," from which Frodo views most of Middle-earth (I, 517-518). And partial identification between Sauron and Odin becomes explicit when the god is called "the Necromancer,"⁵¹ an epithet consistently used for Sauron in The Hobbit (pp. 138 and 281). "The nameless North of Sigurd of the Volsungs, and the prince of all dragons,"⁵² which young Tolkien preferred to more realistic settings, recalls the Wilderland of Bilbo and Smaug. Mention of Gram⁵³ suggests Andúril, the heirloom of Aragorn, another sword that was broken; and "Bifröst

⁴⁹Tree and Leaf, p. 29.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 30.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 31.

⁵²Ibid., p. 41.

⁵³Ibid., p. 59.

guarded by Heimdall with the Gjallarhorn,"⁵⁴ other narrow bridges and marvelous horns. A narrow bridge without a parapet leads into the elvish Rivendale.⁵⁵ The narrow bridge of Khazud-Dûm (I, 428-430), which resembles Bifröst as a defense against a fiery monster, is guarded by Gandalf, who may be identified with Heimdall, not only because their names are similar, but because they are both "storm-crows," warning of coming danger (II, 139). Heimdall's horn suggests Boromir's which may be heard at home if blown anywhere within the realm of Gondor (II, 347). The horn given Merry by Éowyn has such virtue that "he that blows it at need shall set fear in the heart of his enemies and joy in the hearts of his friends" (III, 316).

Celtic references, though not profuse, demonstrate Tolkien's interest in the mythology. He liked "the land of Merlin and Arthur,"⁵⁶ and Gandalf the far-seeing advisor of kings certainly owes much to Merlin, Aragorn to Arthur. "Hy Breasail in the West"⁵⁷ parallels the Undying Lands of the Valar. Tolkien's elves, who will dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (I, 472) once the Ring is destroyed, seem ancestors of the Shee-folk he mentions in a note.⁵⁸ These are the Irish Sidhe, fairy deities dwelling in mounds, tumuli, and grottoes.⁵⁹ The elves in The Hobbit, who are more decadent than Galadriel's subjects (no doubt

⁵⁴ Tree and Leaf, p. 63.

⁵⁵ The Hobbit, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Tree and Leaf, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁸ Tree and Leaf, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Frank Chapin Bray, Bray's Universal Dictionary of Mythology (New York, 1964), p. 18.

because of their distance from her magic ring), already live within a hill behind a magic door; and hobbits, though largely Tolkien's own creation, are a rustic mound-dwelling folk said still to be alive, though "now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find" (I, 11). Tolkien's sinister barrow wights, though more like Old Norse draugar (OE orcneas)⁶⁰ than Irish Shee-folk in character, are supernatural tumulus-dwellers, the shadows of their fair Irish cousins. "On Fairy-stories" reveals such an interest in Norse and Celtic Mythology that they must rank with Old and Middle English literature as major sources for Tolkien.

Between the composition of "On Fairy-stories" and the publication of The Lord of the Rings, there appeared in print several evidences of Tolkien's continuing creative and scholarly activity, and particularly of his work in Old English literature. Margaret Williams' Wordhoard, an historical background to Old English literature illustrated with profuse new translations, acknowledges in 1940 that she was "stimulated by the helpful guidance of Professor J.R.R. Tolkien" (New York, p. vii). That the translations reflect Tolkien's interpretations is suggested not only by this acknowledgment but also by similarities in style. Williams likes old words but avoids dead ones, and she regularly translates OE middangeard as "middle-earth." Also published in 1940 was the edition of John Clark Hall's Beowulf translation, which first included the Tolkien introduction mentioned above. Besides discussing some points embodied in the fiction, this introduction, with its summary of Old English

⁶⁰ Cf. Beowulf, l. 112.

versification illustrated by Modern English verses, reflects Tolkien's desire to transpose the old meter into Modern English. His original sequel to The Battle of Maldon, written in Modern English with the accentual lines and head rhymes of Old English verse, was published in 1953 as The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beornhthelm's Son. There are several passages of head-rhymed verse in The Lord of the Rings, and poems in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil use devices evidently imitated from Old Norse prosody. In 1949, Tolkien published a pleasant tale of dragon-taming which does not take place in the Third Age, but in the Middle Ages. Farmer Giles of Ham, much more a children's book than The Hobbit, nevertheless contains several Old Norse parallels and develops lightly some themes expanded in The Lord of the Rings.

The Fellowship of the Ring and The Two Towers, the first two volumes of The Lord of the Rings, were published in England in 1954, and in 1955 The Return of the King followed. Rising popular interest in Middle-earth drew more books into print. "Translations" from verses ostensibly written or collected by characters in The Lord of the Rings fill out The Adventures of Tom Bombadil (1962), and "On Fairy-stories" and "Leaf by Niggle" (written 1938-39, published 1947) were reprinted in book form in 1964 as Tree and Leaf. American paperback editions of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit in 1965 made Tolkien a best-seller (The Hobbit was revised in 1966) and were followed the next year by a paperback Tolkien Reader reprinting Homecoming, Tree and Leaf, Farmer Giles, and The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. A new children's book, Smith of Wooton Major appeared in 1967, the same year as The Road Goes Ever On, a reprinting of several

songs along with musical arrangements by Donald Swann and notes by Tolkien on elvish language and religion. Poems and Songs of Middle Earth, an L.P. recording from Caedmon Records, includes some of Swann's settings sung by William Elvin as well as readings by Tolkien himself. Recently (March 1969) a paperback volume has been issued reprinting the non-Middle-earth stories, Farmer Giles and Smith. The Silmarillion, a work in the earlier history of Middle-earth which has been in progress since before The Hobbit, is awaited by Tolkien's readers. The Oxford scholar who was forty-two before he published anything besides professional scholarship has sold millions of volumes of fiction, well over a million of the Ballantine edition of The Hobbit alone.

But Tolkien has not abandoned scholarly efforts since the success of his fiction. In 1962 the Early English Text Society published his edition of Ancrene Wisse, the English text of the Ancrene Riwe, a prose treatise on monastic life in the West Midland dialect, and he was one of "the principal collaborators in translation and literary revision" of The Jerusalem Bible, New York, 1966, p. ii. Recently he has translated The Pearl and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, also in West Midland dialect, into Modern English verse. This recent work, and the emphasis on Middle-earth religion in the notes to The Road Goes Ever On, emphasize Tolkien's religious interests. Tolkien's publications show him, then, to be an active professional philologist with specialization in Old English heroic verse and Middle English of the West Highlands, but he is also apparently well-informed in Old Norse and Celtic philology, as well as in the breadth of English literature. Indeed, it is difficult to feel certain that

he is unacquainted with any work of literature.

The organization of this study will place heavy emphasis on Tolkien's first fiction, The Hobbit, considering motifs in The Lord of the Rings and other works primarily as continuations of those already initiated in the earlier book. Some defense is perhaps needed for emphasizing what is regarded as the lesser work, but there need be no apology for studying what was classified on its publication as a children's book, for the stylistic excellence of The Hobbit and its demonstrated appeal to mature readers have since released it from the nursery shelves. The strong simplicity of its story is better in some ways than the great, but sprawling and sometimes flat, narrative to which it is a prelude; and in any case, viewing The Lord of the Rings from within its prelude gives a sense of Tolkien's evolution difficult to achieve otherwise. Emphasis on The Hobbit seems appropriate also because all of Tolkien's fiction is quite recent, the author still alive and working. A substantial documentation of medieval motifs in the twelve hundred pages of The Lord of the Rings would be the result of years of study by more than one man. Even if sufficient preliminary scholarship had already been published, such documentation would be premature before the publication of The Silmarillion, which may be expected to answer many questions and raise others. The Hobbit, one hopes, may be insulated from this upheaval by the expanse of twelve hundred pages. So I have chosen to limit my systematic treatment to The Hobbit as a rich field, and one as large as can be plowed with this year's machinery; but whenever issues raised in that book seem applicable to The Lord of the Rings, I will apply them, and thereby hope to demonstrate internal structures in the fiction, and to better reveal its relation to the ground out of which it grew.

Chapter Two

The Four-Part Structure of Bilbo's Education

The Hobbit traces the evolution of Bilbo from "the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat" who "looks more like a grocer than a burglar" (p. 30) to the real leader of the dwarfs' adventure (p. 211) who steals a cup from a dragon and a gem from Thorin and, more important, discovers that Smaug, like Fafnir, is vulnerable under the left shoulder.¹ Though Bilbo is half a century old, his size, domesticity and innocence suggest childhood--descended though he may be from Bull-roarer Took, "who was so huge (for a hobbit) that he could ride a horse" (p. 30)--and like Parzival, he matures through a series of hardships and tests from a sheltered innocent into a proven hero, uncowed by dragons and uncorrupted by gold. The story of Bilbo's education may be broken into four parts: (1) the departure from the Shire, (2) the adventures in the Misty Mountains, (3) the adventures in Mirkwood, and (4) the adventures at the Lonely Mountain. Though each represents a higher stage, the parts are similar: each begins with a well-equipped journey into the dark wilderness and moves through want, danger, captivity and unlikely escape to a hospitable house where the expedition rests and resupplies. The happy ending, according to Tolkien, is the heart of the fairy story and gives joy, not by denying the possibility of defeat, but by denying universal final defeat. The consolation of the happy ending is analogous to, and no less dignified than, the purgation of the tragic one. The

¹ Cf. Margaret Schlauch, trans., The Saga of the Volsungs (New York, 1949), p. 96.

Hobbit consists of four distinct, but not separate, tales, each ending with the consolations of food, companionship and temporary security after a "sudden joyous turn," an unexpected rescue. These tales are parts of a full story, which is part of the history of Middle-earth, which it itself only a thread (though a bright one) in "the intricate web of story."²

Because the four parts of The Hobbit are somewhat parallel, elements in one part have equivalents in the others. A brief chart of these equivalent elements, entered before each of the four parts of the following summary, may help to elucidate the four-part structure of the story.

Part I. Between the Shire and Wilderland, Chapters I-III. Foes: Trolls. Place of peril: Darkness under trees. Savior: Gandalf. Bilbo's test: Proves he is a burglar. Bilbo's prize: Elvish knife. River: Loudwater. House: Elrond's at Rivendale.

Blowing smoke rings one morning by his round green door, Bilbo Baggins sees a strange old man with a staff. Though his mother was of the adventurous Took family, the hobbit has "apparently settled down immovably" in a habit of domestic ease in the comfortable burrow his father built with his mother's money (p. 17). So, though Baggins-ishly domestic on the surface, the hobbit and his home have a latent Tookishness, which begins to be awakened when the old man identifies himself as Gandalf the Wizard, a friend of the Old Took. A rhapsody on "splendid" fireworks and a slip of the tongue convince Gandalf that the hobbit is asking for adventure. "Indeed for your old grand-

²Tree and Leaf, p. 20.

father Took's sake," Gandalf says, "and for the sake of poor Belladonna, I will give you what you asked for" (p. 19).

The next day at teatime thirteen strange dwarfs arrive a few at a time, taking advantage of Bagginsish hospitality. Balin, the old dwarf who will become quite fond of Bilbo, arrives second, and Gandalf comes in the last group along with Thorin Oakenshield, the leader of the dwarfs. After a messy tea and comic cleanup, in which the dwarfs are merely quaint and the hobbit fussy,³ the dwarfs play music into the night, singing songs of dragons, fire and gold. "Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains . . . explore the caves and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick" (p. 28). But the mood fades, and Bilbo squeals and collapses at the suggestion that he "may never return" from a mysterious adventure (p. 29). The comments his fainting excites are so insulting that his Tookishness suddenly bursts free: "Many a time afterwards the Baggins part regretted what he did," but he swears to do anything the dwarfs want done, even "to fight the wild Were-worms in the Last Desert" (p. 31).

Though the hobbit keeps his word, he has not yet emerged from childishness: "my boy," Gandalf calls him (p. 32); and Tolkien apologizes for Bilbo's ignorance of dragon's hugeness, "He was only a little hobbit you must remember" (p. 33). The dwarfs explain that Bilbo is to be their burglar as they cross the Misty Mountains to reclaim treasure stolen from their fathers by the dragon Smaug, for a burglar is needed in the absence of a "Mighty Warrior," and "in this neighborhood

³ This is one of the places early in the book where it is apparent that Tolkien, who moves so smoothly through the second half, is struggling for balance and almost falling.

heroes are scarce or simply not to be found" (p. 33). Bilbo, the three-foot substitute for a hero, "so far still Tookishly determined to go on with things" (p. 34), has only to hear a few tales of dragons and hardship before he feels his Tookishness "wearing off" (p. 38) and falls asleep doubting that he will go at all.

When Bilbo awakens late the next morning he is oddly disappointed at the dwarfs' leaving without a word. But he is eating a second breakfast when Gandalf brings word that the dwarfs are waiting at the inn. "To the end of his days Bilbo could never remember how he found himself outside" (p. 41), riding off to adventure with a wizard and thirteen dwarfs. After many days the weather and countryside turn bad. There are no inns, and, with Gandalf mysteriously absent, the expedition loses most of its baggage in a swollen river. Around a fire in a dark clump of trees, which he has been sent to investigate, Bilbo faces his first test. His Tookish attempt to take⁴ a purse from the pocket of one of the three huge cannibalistic trolls he finds there fails, but he is soon ignored as the dwarfs begin approaching the fire and, one by one, are caught and put in sacks. Besides trying to pick the troll's pocket, Bilbo shows bravery in this episode by refusing to betray his friends and by tripping a troll whom Thorin is hopelessly fighting. But, however courageous, a hobbit is no troll-killer, and it takes a wizard's lore to keep the monsters quarreling until the sunrise turns them to stone. Gandalf has returned. Bilbo's burglary does help win the ancient blades which save the expedition in Part II, for he finds the key which unlocks the trolls' hoard of treasure and weapons. Then the company departs for a place called Rivendale, which is only a few

⁴"Took" is, after all, the preterit of "to take."

days' ride ahead.

With "not much in their bags" (p. 55) they ford the river identified as the Loudwater in The Lord of the Rings and come to the edge of the mountains. Bilbo is "thinking once again of his comfortable chair before the fire" (p. 55), but, however Bagginsish his thoughts, he is on a Tookish quest and cannot turn back. Because they "need food, for one thing, and rest in reasonable safety" (p. 56), Gandalf leads them along a narrow path through bare country to a hidden valley where, in the twilight, they can hear elves singing under trees. After a few days of rest with Elrond, who is half-man and half-elf, they are ready to cross the mountains. First, Elrond identifies the blades from the troll-lair as elvish and discovers on the treasure map invisible writing which tells that the side door in the mountain can only be opened at sunset on Durin's day. But no one knows for sure what day that is any more.

Part II. The Misty Mountains, Chapters IV-VIII. Foes: Goblins, Gollum and Wargs. Places of peril: Tunnels underground, dark under trees. Saviors: Gandalf, Eagles. Bilbo's test: Saves himself, has pity. Bilbo's prize: The Ring. River: The Great River (Anduin). House: Beorn's Hall.

After days on crooked, cold and lonely mountain paths, Bilbo is thinking again of "safe and comfortable things" (p. 64) when a frightful thunderstorm forces the company to shelter in a dry, clean little cave. Bilbo helps Gandalf save the dwarfs, for the hobbit awakens just in time to warn the wizard so that he is not captured by the goblins whose doorstep the cave is. But everyone else is captured, including Baggins and the baggage. Condemned before the goblin king,

the company is saved again with the help of Gandalf's fiery wand and the elvish swords. Fleeing down black tunnels lit by the glowing wand, they repel one goblin assault before a confused ambush leaves Bilbo stunned and forgotten in the dark.

Awakening, Bilbo crawls through the gloom until he touches "a tiny ring of cold metal" and puts it in his pocket. "It was the turning point in his career, but he did not know it" (p. 76). His Baggins personality dominant, he sits down to think about "frying bacon and eggs" (p. 76) and is about to foolishly light a pipe when he discovers the elvish knife hidden under his clothes. The blade awakens something Tookish, almost something elvish, in him ("It was often said . . . that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife," [p. 16]), and the hobbit becomes a reluctant warrior--a sword-boy trotting along "with his little sword held in front of him and one hand feeling the wall" (p. 77).

The tunnel finally ends at an underground lake where Gollum, the fallen hobbit who is so important in The Lord of the Rings, paddles about in the dark and eats whatever or whoever happens by; but, because of the bright sword, he challenges Bilbo to a riddle contest rather than eating him immediately. If Bilbo wins, Gollum will show the way out. If Bilbo loses, he will be eaten. When Bilbo luckily wins with the question (not a riddle), "What have I got in my pocket?" (p. 85), Gollum rushes back to his island for a magic ring of invisibility, but finds it missing and guesses what is in Bilbo's pocket. Running up the tunnel, Bilbo learns the ring's magic and invisibly trails Gollum toward the exit, leaping over the demented wretch rather than killing him. Having shown himself both brave and merci-

ful--an excellent mixture of Took and Baggins virtues--he dodges goblin guards and squeezes through a slightly open door into the sheltering sunlight. Goblins, like all evil creatures, hate the sunlight.

Finding that he has come out on the far side of the mountains, Bilbo has Tookishly determined to return for his comrades when he hears dwarf voices. The ring is kept secret, so he wins more respect than he will deserve before Part III. Hurrying downhill to avoid goblin pursuit, the company stumbles into a dark clearing full of wolves and climbs trees just in time. Gandalf scorches the wolves with wizard fire, but tables are turned when the goblins arrive and kindle the trees. Even the wizard cannot save them now. Suddenly eagles, "not kindly birds" but noble creatures who do not love goblins (p. 108), fly the company to the comfortable safety of their high Eyrie. Part of the great eucatastrophe in the Battle of the Five Armies in Part IV, the eagles help this time by giving food and setting the company down nearer its destination.

On a hill of rock in the middle of The Great River, the wizard reveals that he must leave the dwarfs soon, after he has seen them resupplied at the hall of Beorn, a huge man who can turn himself into a bear and does not "hunt or eat wild animals" (118). Whereas Elrond was half elf, Beorn is half bear. Just as the dwarfs took refuge from trolls with elves, they take refuge from wolves with good animals, and it seems consistent that birds should bear them there. Gandalf has a plan for gaining hospitality from Beorn, who lives alone, served by intelligent animals. A variation on the plan which worked so well with Bilbo and so badly with the trolls, it is simply that the dwarfs arrive a few at a time while Gandalf tells the tale of

their adventures. The plan works. After a supper "such as they had not had since they . . . said good-bye to Elrond" (p. 127), they sing and sleep, to be awakened at midnight by sounds like the tramping of many bears outside. Finally, after a day spent in his fierce bear shape investigating Gandalf's story, Beorn returns to offer help and advice. To avoid goblins, the dwarfs must follow an old elvish road through Mirkwood, but they must not touch the black stream that flows there or leave the path for any reason. As they say farewell to Gandalf on the forest's edge, a new sub-tale has already begun, one in which Bilbo, master of sword and ring, will find his heroism put to a harder test.

Part III. Mirkwood, Chapters VIII-X. Foes: Spiders and greedy elves. Places of peril: Dark under trees and tunnels underground. Savior: Bilbo. Bilbo's test: Saving the dwarfs. Bilbo's prize: Leadership. River: Running. House: At Esgaroth.

A new moral complexity enters in Part III. In the first two parts the company is threatened only by obvious villains--disorderly, quarrelsome cannibals who hate the sun--and takes refuge with orderly and friendly non-hunters. In Part III they are imprisoned by hunting elves who are, nevertheless, Good People, and they take refuge with men who have corrupt leadership. Dwarfish greed makes the elves enemies, and human greed welcomes the dwarfs at Esgaroth. The corruption of the "good" dwarfs which forces Bilbo to turn against them in Part IV is already underway. Again short of food in a dark tunnel, this time under trees, the dwarfs cross the forbidden stream only because Bilbo's eyes are sharp enough to help them grapple a little

boat. But as the last dwarf is crossing, a black stag leaps over him, pushing him into the soporific water, so he falls asleep just as white deer and the sound of distant horns suggest entrance into an elvish otherworld. Climbing a tall tree in what he does not know is a small dishlike valley (Bunyan would call it the Dell of Despair), Bilbo sees only more trees and can tell no news of the forest's edge to the hungry dwarfs, or to the stream's victim, who awakens suddenly telling dreams of a woodland feast. Balin sees light in the trees, and the company foolishly leaves the road to approach an elvish feast. But the light dies suddenly. They chase other lights, and soon Bilbo is lost--alone, hungry and asleep in the darkness. Bag-gins that he is, he is dreaming of bacon and eggs when the giant spider grabs him.

Naming the knife with which he kills the spider Sting, Bilbo searches for his friends. They are in bags again, this time cobweb sacks suspended from boughs by a tribe of great spiders, and in Gandalf's absence, Bilbo must save them. Invisible, he taunts the spiders and leads them away, doubling back to free the dwarfs. With the help of Sting and much hobbit valor, they escape the spiders' realm but are still lost, hungry and tired under the endless leaves. The discovery that Thorin, the dwarf chief, is missing underlines Bilbo's assumption of leadership just before they are surrounded at twilight by a troop of elves. Because the Elf-King wants to know the dwarfs' errand and they have no wish to share treasure, it seems they may be trapped forever in an underground palace behind magic doors. But Bilbo, whose magic ring lets him move unnoticed, discovers that Thorin is also imprisoned and conceives a plan. Stealing a key from

a drunken jailer, he frees the dwarfs and packs them into empty food barrels that the elves will float down river to Esgaroth. And he leaps invisibly after them. So it is that the company, half-dead with hardship, and enclosed in things baglike, washes ashore at the lakemen's town within sight of The Mountain.

There are again consolations of rest, food, shelter, and song in the houses of men, but unlike Elrond and Beorn, the lakemen have lost their nobility in the shadow of the dragon. Their leader is a skeptical, cowardly, selfish merchant--a sort of Kay without an Arthur--who helps the dwarfs only because his public demands it. Emblematic of the town's corruption is its location on piles in the river, a passive defense against Smaug, for, to get to their partially good haven, the dwarfs cross only part way across the river. They fully cross only when, reprovisioned, they enter the Desolation of Smaug.

Part IV. The Lonely Mountain, Chapter XI-XIX. Foes: Dragon, dissension, goblins and wargs. Places of peril: Tunnels underground, the battlefield. Saviors: Bilbo and Bard; Eagles and Beorn. Bilbo's prizes: Treasure and safe return. Rivers: All previous. House: Bag-End.

Because Part IV, as the last part, must resolve the total story as well as end itself--and must balance Part I--it is longer and more complex than the others. Part III had only three chapters, but two of Part IV's eight chapters are devoted to consolation after all real peril is past. In a sense, though evil could triumph any time before Chapter XVIII, everything after Smaug's death is epilogue.

The treasure secured, two things are happening: superficially, people are facing the deadly problems of dividing treasure; but more deeply, the treasure is testing people, destroying those who submit to greed.

Again Bilbo's Tookishness is fading as the company enters the Desolation "at the waning of the year" (p. 195). The dwarfs despair when no tool will break the secret door, so only Bilbo is watching when sunset comes on Durin's day. Thanks to him, the tunnel is open, and the time has come for him to be a burglar. Though he has a magic ring and is "a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag-End long ago" (p. 204), the Baggins part of him wishes for home, and matters become more serious when he sees the dragon's glow from inside the tunnel: "Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it" (p. 205). Bilbo steals a cup from the sleeping dragon, who soon awakens from dreams of a bill-boy--"a warrior, altogether insignificant in size but provided with a bitter sword and great courage" (p. 207)--discovers his loss and scorches the mountainside. Huddled behind their door, the dwarfs are helpless. Bilbo, in a second invisible visit to the dragon, carelessly reveals that Esgaroth helped the dwarfs, but he discovers an armorless spot in the dragon's belly. As Smaug flies to Esgaroth for revenge, so flies an intelligent thrush with tidings of his weak spot, which tidings permit a noble archer to slay the dragon as it destroys the town. Thorin has shown symptoms of dragon-sickness by claiming the Arkenstone, a priceless gem, as his alone.

The door smashed, trapped in their tunnels, the dwarfs must follow Bilbo down to the dragon's lair, where the hobbit finds and

hides the Arkenstone. Lighting torches, arming themselves, the adventurers march out the great cavern door, past ancient ruins, to a watchhouse high up the mountainside, where they rest and see only "a gathering of many birds" (p. 233). The dragon's slayer, descended from the nobles of Dale, begins Esgaroth's reconstruction in the name of the selfish town master, then marches off to the Lonely Mountain with an army of townsfolk and friendly elves.

Because dwarfs understand no bird-speech, the helpful thrush brings them an ancient raven, who tells of the dragon's death and the march, advising Thorin to cooperate with the arriving army. Fortifying the cavern door, the dwarfs watch the army gather and sing to drown out elvish music, but it is a harsh situation, with Thorin growing more and more fierce in thoughts of the Arkenstone.⁵ A dwarf army from the Iron Hills is expected soon; a battle between the several "good" peoples seems inevitable. To make peace, Bilbo is willing to lose the Arkenstone and anger a dragon-sick dwarf, so he slips into the besieging camp and gives the elves and men the gem with which to bargain. He is surprised to see Gandalf there, but Thorin is more

⁵ There is some basis for ending Part IV with Chapter XV, seeing the dwarfs' fortified cave-home as its House and the dragon's death as its final eucatastrophe. The singing and the fact that the dwarfs are home suggest this, in which case the fourth and fifth parts could be represented as follows:

Part IV. The Lonely Mountain, Chapters XI-XV. Foe: Dragon. Place of peril: Tunnel underground. Saviors: Bilbo and Bard. Bilbo's test: Courage without hope. Bilbo's prize: Arkenstone, armor. River: Running. House: Thorin's Hall.

Part V. Battlefield, Chapters XVI-XIX. Foes: dissension, goblins. Place of peril: Battlefield. Saviors: Eagles and Beorn. Bilbo's test: Peace chosen over wealth. Bilbo's prize: Gold and safe return. Rivers: All previous. House: Bag-End. The main flaw in this scheme is that it takes the dragon from the last part, where he seems to belong both because he is the last new foe and because of his suggested identification with Bilbo.

surprised to see his gem in "enemy" hands the next day, when he agrees to elvish terms and expells Bilbo from the cave. For, though the hobbit has crept back to his friends, he does not lie when asked who took the stone. The solitary act of self-sacrifice for peace, the renouncing of greed and truthfulness in the face of danger are final proofs of his heroism. His Tookishness established, Bilbo will henceforth be little more than baggage.

The rest of the tale moves swiftly. Bilbo's sacrifice leads nowhere. Before the treaty can be executed, dwarfs arrive from the Iron Hills, and battle seems inevitable when, unexpectedly, the "evil" arrive in force. A horde of goblins and wolves attacks the quickly united elves, dwarfs, and men. The Battle of Five Armies begins. Outnumbered, the good armies are losing when Bilbo looks skyward and is struck senseless as he is crying, "The Eagles are coming!" Later he makes peace with a dying Thorin and learns that the eagles helped the good armies, but it was the arrival of Beorn in his bear shape which turned the battle. Treasure is divided to everyone's satisfaction, Bilbo receiving all he can easily transport, and, after a winter at Beorn's and a spring visit with Elrond, he arrives home to discover the contents of Bag-End on auction, himself legally dead. Mildly correcting the misunderstanding, Bilbo lives happily in a Baggins fashion, but without losing his friendship with dwarfs and wizards, and his Tookish love for the elvish and the good.

The humorous name, Bilbo, may be a compound of two Middle English words suggesting the hobbit's initial immaturity and later heroism. Bil-böie 'sword-boy' is fitting because his acquisition of Sting in

the trolls' cave is an essential part of his growth, permitting him to dominate Gollum and the spiders and to assume leadership over the dwarfs. Middle English bille 'note' suggests the domesticity which seems his whole character at first:

The next day he had almost forgotten about Gandalf. He did not remember things very well, unless he put them down on his Engagement Tablet: like this: Gandalf Tea Wednesday (17)

Bil means 'sword' in OE heroic literature⁶ but bōie is not yet in the language. Martial implications of the word seem more evident, however, when we notice that the Old English for boy is cniht (Mod. E. 'knight'). With the aid of his sword, Bilbo grows from a boy in deeds as well as size into a knight "more worthy to wear the armor of elf-princes than many that have looked more comely in it" (p. 258).

Though it may be an accident that the days of the meeting with Gandalf, of tea with the dwarfs and of the departure for Wilderland--Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday--are the three days named in English after Norse gods of war, it is difficult to feel sure that anything Tolkien does is accidental when it involves Germanic Philology.

Bilbo thinks of calling his memoirs, which are the pseudo-historical source of The Hobbit, "There and Back Again, a Hobbit's Holiday" (p. 285), and the tale is cyclical, beginning and ending in Bilbo's comfortable hole. Gandalf and the dwarfs start the action, which ends with a visit from the wizard and Balin, Bilbo's best friend among the dwarfs. Bilbo is smoking "an enormous long wooden pipe" (p. 17) at the very beginning when Gandalf appears, and at the very

⁶Beowulf, ll. 40, 583, et passim.

end Bilbo laughs and hands him the tobacco jar (p. 287). The cycle is not a simple return, but part of a spiral. The action in which the hobbit played a part has produced prosperity, for his waistcoat is "more extensive" and has "real gold buttons," and Balin has a longer beard and a magnificent jeweled belt. The good people around the Mountain, we are told, have prospered (p. 286), and Bilbo has grown to be a hobbit of the world. He has "lost his reputation" with his provincial neighbors and taken to "writing poetry and visiting the elves" (p. 285).

Not only does the end of the story suggest the beginning, but there is an odd parallel between the hobbit standing at the door of his hole under The Hill smoking and Smaug the dragon (whose name J.S. Ryan derives from OE smeocan 'to emit smoke'),⁷ fuming in his cavern under The Mountain. The identification is strengthened by Tolkien's calling the rock shelf by the secret door to The Mountain "the doorstep" in a chapter title, and by Bilbo's wish as he enters the heart of the mountain that "I could wake up and find this beastly tunnel was my own front hall at home" (p. 205). It is, in a sense, a ghastly version of his own front hall, but he cannot awaken from it. Arriving "there" at the end of his quest, he is "back again" at a terrible duplicate of his home, and he must defeat that terror before returning home. "Going on from there," Tolkien writes a few sentences later, "was the bravest thing he ever did" (p. 205). Considering this identification, it is interesting that when he returns and finds his hole (like Smaug's) being plundered, he takes the loss of "many of

⁷ "Germanic Mythology Applied--The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory," Folklore, LXXVII (Spring 1966), 50.

his silver spoons" (p. 285) more gracefully than Smaug does the loss of a stolen cup. For it is probably Bilbo's high resistance to greed, called "dragon-sickness" by Tolkien (p. 286), that lets him remain "very happy to the end of his days" (p. 285).

The structure of The Hobbit, then, involves, opposition and return: the end of the quest is an evil double of its beginning, the end of the story a return to that beginning. Within this structure, the four parts parallel one another and, as far as their linear shape allows, parallel the overall story. Each part begins and ends with departure from a comfortable house with well-stocked bags, and at each house there is song. Though underground, Bilbo's home has none of the discomforts we associate with caves (p. 15), so it is a combination of house and hole: an overlapping significance which is called for by the overlapping structures of opposition and return. To balance the Lonely Mountain, it must be a cave, but to be a happy point of departure and return, it must be homelike and that, to most readers, implies a house. There are, in fact, only three houses visited in The Hobbit--Elrond's house, Beorn's hall, and Esgaroth--and all three are places of rest, resupply and song, havens of consolation after the dearth and danger through which the company has passed. Esgaroth is destroyed by the dragon's fall, but it is not surprising that Bilbo and Gandalf stop at the two other houses--those of good animals and the elves--to rest on the return journey. They stop only at those two houses. So there is no small reason for seeing these three houses, along with Bilbo's hole, as the beginning and ending points of the four subtales of The Hobbit.

The adventures have similar shapes. The company runs short of

supplies (losing its ponies in parts II and IV) and is caught by evil beings in a dark place. In parts I and III the dwarfs are put in sacks by hungry trolls or spiders at night under trees; in II and IV they are trapped underground by goblins or a dragon. Bilbo, briefly separated from the expedition during each of the four parts, earns a prize, material or moral. There is only one close call in part I, two or three in the other parts, but after the final escape in each part, the company crosses a river and comes to a place of food, song and companionship. Suggesting the visits with Tom Bombadil and with Galadriel in The Fellowship of the Ring, these joyful houses are the most pleasant passages in The Hobbit, but only because of the intervening perils. Pleasure is sharpened by the knowledge that the road waits ahead, "and even if they passed all the perils of the road, the dragon was waiting at the end" (p. 134), and by the sense of relief which follows their passage across the water which divides them from their enemies.

More comment is in order here on "the Consolation of the Happy Ending," which Tolkien suggests "that all complete fairy-stories must have."⁸ Treating fairy-stories refreshingly as serious art, he begins to do for them what Aristotle did for drama and finds, in place of the tragic catastrophe and purgation, a magical eucatastrophe and consolation. The eucatastrophic tale is "the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function."⁹ The newly-coined word is needed because the familiar "happy ending" is misleading. The heart of the

⁸ Tree and Leaf, p. 68.

⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

fairy-story is not the ending, but the eucatastrophe or sudden joyous "turn," the coming of Gandalf or the eagles, the deus ex machina which mars tragedy but is a beauty here. The joyous turn does not deny the possibility of defeat or preclude a later tragic fall: it only asserts the possibility of deliverance, "giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."¹⁰ Beowulf's victory in Grendel's cave, for instance, is a strong eucatastrophe--a joyous reversal celebrated with song and dependent on the chance discovery of a marvelous sword that will bite the ogress--but it does not deny the possibility of his defeat by the dragon, or even by another ogress.¹¹ The joyous turn is not the end, "for there is no true end to any fairy-tale."¹² Each story is only part of a larger story.

As a scholar, Tolkien is conscious that he is only adding a few leaves to "the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales";¹³ and as a romancer, he suggests a vast early history of which his tales are only fragments.¹⁴ In The Hobbit, which may be read as prologue to The Lord

¹⁰ Tree and Leaf, p. 68.

¹¹ Beowulf, ll. 572-573.

¹² Tree and Leaf, p. 68.

¹³ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁴ Because Tolkien's stories are written as though they were a translation from ancient history, complete with scholarly apparatus, some critics have complained that the history interferes with the fiction. They may find the apparatus tedious, but it is indeed fiction, though written (like Swift's Tale of a Tub) in the form of scholarship. The Professor Tolkien who annotates the Red Book of Westmarch is a fictional person created by Tolkien the romancer. The notes are merely another style of narrative, the persuasiveness of which is attested to by its being confused with non-fiction. See Ready, Understanding Tolkien, p. 74.

of the Rings, there are hints of goblin wars in the mines of Moria (pp. 37 and 65) and of the Necromancer driven from his tower to the south of Mirkwood (p. 281). These places and the results of these events are shown at first hand in the later romance, where there are dozens of additional "historical" allusions, and the appendices refer to The Silmarillion, an unpublished Middle-earth history first written by Tolkien years before The Hobbit.¹⁵ Sam and Frodo discuss the Tree of Tales at a dark moment in The Two Towers:

"Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and blacker danger than ours We've got--you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales ever end?"
 "No, they never end as tales," said Frodo.
 "But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended" (II, 408).

Bilbo's part, which is told mostly in The Hobbit and becomes part of other tales when he carries an ancient knife from the goblin wars and discovers the One Ring of Sauron, easily divides into four parts, each one in itself a little tale. Though, in the words of an early review, the book is "crammed with episodes that will obliterate need for meals and bed,"¹⁶ it is not episodic like Orlando Furioso. Structures of opposition and return submerge the four tales, each dependent on the others, in a relentless coherent narrative flow.

¹⁵ Lin Carter, Tolkien, p. 27.

¹⁶ Times Literary Supplement, October 2, 1937.

Chapter Three

Old Norse and Old English Sources of Tolkien's Names

In no aspect of Tolkien's fiction is the richness and appropriateness of his invention more apparent than in his invented names. There are over a thousand in his fiction, more than fifty of them in The Hobbit, and most seem somehow to suit their objects, to sound peculiarly right to the modern ear. Although certainly an intangible element of taste must have affected his selection of names, Tolkien did not invent them in a vacuum but, using one process or another, derived many of them from medieval tongues with which he was familiar, particularly Old English and Old Norse. Because of this, no study of medieval sources of Tolkien's fiction would be complete without some attention to sources of the names, and because most of the names in The Hobbit are introduced early in the story, a discussion of them seems appropriate here, in advance of that of sources for characters, events, and objects in the story. Tolkien's names which have possible Old Norse and Old English derivation may be divided into three classes: (1) names clearly derived from Old English, (2) names clearly derived from Old Norse, and (3) names of doubtful derivation which, however, seem to echo certain Norse or English words. Because this essay is essentially concerned with The Hobbit, a brief final section will also discuss names in that story which seem to be related to languages other than English or Norse.

OLD ENGLISH DERIVATIONS

Most of the places and things in Tolkien's Rohan have names

which are common nouns in OE.¹ The king of the Men of the Mark (OE mearc 'boundary, frontier district') is Theoden (OE ðeoden 'lord, king') who rules at Edoras (OE eodoras 'courts, dwellings'). The founder of his dynasty was Eorl (OE eorl 'warrior, nobleman') the Young, who fell in battle in the Wold (OE weald 'forest'). His descendants include Brego (OE brego 'ruler, king'), Baldor (OE bealdor 'lord, hero'),² Aldor (OE ealdor 'elder, lord, king'), Fréa (OE

¹In the following chapter no attempt will be made to independently derive historical meanings or spellings of words, but rather the Modern English meanings given for OE, ME, and ON words and the spellings of those words will be those found in standard reference dictionaries. Because the purpose of this discussion is not to establish historical meanings or forms of words, but to establish connections between medieval words and the names in Tolkien's fiction and to make some general observations about these connections, it is hoped that this somewhat imprecise method will be sufficient to produce reliable conclusions. To avoid an unwieldy and repetitious profusion of footnotes, the reference works in which the writer found particular glosses or spellings will not normally be indicated, but it is hoped that the following information will enable the interested reader to review personally the sources consulted in the preparation of this chapter: the source regularly consulted in regard to OE words has been John R. Clark Hall, A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary (London, 1960), but because of numerous parallels between The Hobbit and Beowulf, a poem concerning which Tolkien has published a distinguished piece of criticism, it seemed that the particular forms and meanings of OE words appearing in Beowulf deserved special attention; often consulted, therefore, has been the "Glossary" to Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf; the source regularly consulted in regard to ME words has been Francis Henry Stratmann, A Middle-English Dictionary, rev. Henry Bradley (London, 1963), and the MED (U. of Mich.); regularly consulted in regard to ON forms has been Geir T. Zoega, A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic (London, 1965); in certain cases use has been made of Oxford English Dictionary, 1933.

²"Baldor" illustrates how carefully the names, even of characters only alluded to by Tolkien, are chosen. We learn that Baldor, King Brego's son, "vowed that he would tread 'the Paths of the Dead' and did not return" (III, 434). Significantly, modern English synonyms given for his name in Hall's Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary include "hero" but not "prince" or "king," for he died before his father. His name resembles OE bēalu 'bale, destruction' and ON Baldr, Odin's beautiful son, who was killed prematurely and could not be released from the land of the dead despite the gods' efforts. See E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion

(OE fréa 'ruler, king, master'), Fréawine (OE fréawine 'lord and friend'), Goldwine (OE goldwine 'liberal prince, king'), Déor (OE déor 'brave, fierce'), Gram (OE gram 'angry, fierce'), Helm (OE helm 'protector, lord'), Haeleth (OE haeleth 'hero, fighter'), Fréalaf (OE fréalaf 'mighty survivor', ruling after the deaths in battle of Helm and his sons), Brytta (OE brytta 'giver, prince'), Walda (OE wealdend 'leader, ruler, king'), Folca (OE folca 'of the nation'), Folcwine (OE folcwine 'friend of the people'), Fengel (OE fengel 'lord, prince, king'), and Thengel (OE ðengel 'prince, ruler, king'). None of these names appears in Beowulf as a proper name, but all are words or combinations of words found in that poem, and Fréa, Fréawine and Fréalaf parallel Fréawaru, the daughter of Hrothgar who is mentioned in Tree and Leaf (p. 29) in a discussion of the connection between her lover, Ingeld, son of Froda, and the Norse god Frey. Frey's name is ON cognate of OE fréa. Folca and Folcwine and Walda suggest Folcwalda, who is mentioned in Beowulf. Déor and Walda compare with Déor and Waldere in the OE poems that go by their names. "Walther," another spelling for Waldere, also appears in The Nibelungenlied. Gram, besides being the great sword of Sigurd, is a Danish king in Saxo's history,³ and Thengel, King of the Mark, parallels Thengil, King of Finmark, in that work.⁴ In his "Prefatory Remarks" to Beowulf, Tolkien points out that "Old English . . . built up a long list of synonyms, or partial equivalents, to denote things with

of Ancient Scandinavia (New York, 1964), p. 107.

³Saxo Grammaticus, The First Nine Books of the Danish History, trans. Oliver Elton (London, 1894), pp. 18ff.

⁴Ibid., p. 203.

which Northern verse was specially concerned" (p. xxi). Though these synonyms are a barrier to translation, they may be, as Tolkien demonstrates, a convenience to the writer of fictional history, for his catalogue of the Kings of the Mark is a list of OE words meaning "king" or designating royal qualities. He has selected them, occasionally modernizing their spelling, and used them as proper names.

There are two main language groups in Middle-earth, Elvish and Westron. The languages of the Woses, the Ents and the Orcs belong to neither of these groups, but the first two are unwritten and spoken by only a few, and the third is fragmented into "many barbarous dialects" (III, 511). Most of the names of persons and places around Gondor are based, it seems, on one or another form of Elvish, and Tolkien has written several poems in that language, which is of his own invention. Languages of the Westron group are another matter. In Appendix F to The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien, impersonating the scholarly translator of an ancient manuscript, explains that, since he translated the Westron of his source as Modern English, "the Mannish languages that are related to the Westron should, it seemed to me, be turned into forms related to English" (III, 517). This is why the Men of the Rohan, whose speech is more conservative but the same stock as the hobbits', speak Old English in the actual "translation." We have already seen how consistently Tolkien draws on Old English vocabulary in the naming of Kings of the Mark, and many more examples of Old English names in Rohan could be given.⁵ One of the most beautiful is Dwimordene, OE dwimordenu 'valley of illusion',

⁵For a more complete, alphabetically arranged list of names based on Old English words, see Appendix.

which is Wormtongue's slighting name for Lothlórien (II, 150).

Tolkien uses Old English extensively, though not consistently, in the formation of names even outside of Rohan. Sauron echoes sār, which means both 'pain' and 'sorrow', and his Mordor suggests morōor 'murder, mortal sin, misery', with perhaps a hint of mōr 'moor, morass'. Shelob, the giant she-spider who poisons Frodo, reflects lobbe 'spider', and Bilbo taunts the spiders of Mirkwood by calling them Attercop, ātorcoppe 'spider'. After being rescued from orcs (orcneās 'monsters') and wargs (wearg 'wolf, felon'), Bilbo's company takes refuge with Beorn, (OE beorn 'hero, man, bear'). Later the hobbit helps kill the dragon Smaug (smēocan 'to emit smoke'), and finds the Arkenstone (eorcnanstān 'precious stone'). Old Norse forms could be given for some of these words, such as björn for Beorn and vargr for warg, but this is to be expected because ancient English and Norse are near relatives. Most of Tolkien's names are derived directly from the English, and there is a reason for this. When he coins names from OE metal, he is not merely saving himself the trouble of inventing new ones, nor merely playing a scholarly game. For Old English is not a foreign language, but one "that after many centuries has still essential kinship with our own."⁶ No scholarship is needed to sense the presence of "sorrow" in Sauron, "murder" in Mordor, "smoke" in Smaug, or "bear" in Beorn. Much of Tolkien's "gift for naming" derives from his tastefully using philology to coin names which are English and do say something about the thing named, but which are so

⁶ J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, Lewis E. Nicholson, ed. (Notre Dame, 1963), p. 88; originally printed in Proceedings of the British Academy, XXII (1936), 245-295.

muffled by centuries of linguistic change that they avoid the harshness and flatness of, for instance, John Bunyan's allegoric names. Tolkien eschews Smokey the Dragon and Bear-man for the more dignified Smaug and Beorn, but these names are English, and English readers feel the vibrations. If he had written in Danish, he would probably have derived them from Old Norse. Nearly all of the names derived from Old English appear in that language as common nouns rather than as proper names. Tolkien's procedure seems to be merely to select an Old English word designating an object's general class or dominant characteristic and to use that word, capitalized, as the object's name.

OLD NORSE DERIVATIONS

The Voluspá, which stands at the beginning of the Codex Reginus, the main manuscript of the Poetic Edda, records the prophecies of a völva 'wise woman' whom Odin has called up from the dead. After telling of the creation of worlds and the convening of the gods, she describes the origin of dwarfs. The interpolated catalogue of names which follows is the source not only of most of Tolkien's dwarf names but also of Gandalf. Though "in the shape of men" (III, 455), Tolkien's wizards are messengers from the Far West, the land of elves, so they are actually elves or something greater. Gandálf 'Magic Elf' seems particularly appropriate for a wizard armed with a fire-shooting staff because the name's first element is related to ON gandr 'magic staff'. Like the names of Tolkien's other wizards, Saruman and Radagast, Gandalf is related to a compound meaning some form of "wise person" in a medieval tongue. Radagast seems to echo OE ræd 'wisdom' and gast 'spirit, man', whereas Saruman suggests OE searo 'cunning' and mann 'man'.

Like Gandalf, the names of nearly all of Tolkien's dwarfs appear as proper names in six stanzas of the Voluspá, quoted below with names used by Tolkien underlined:

There was Motsognir the mightiest made
Of all the dwarfs and Durin next;
Many a likeness of men they made,
The dwarfs in the earth, Durin said.

Nyi and Nithri, Northri and Suthri,
Austri and Vestri, Althjof, Dvalin,
Nar and Nain, Niping, Dain,
Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Nori,
An and Onar, Ai, Mjothvitnir.

Vigg and Gandalf, Vindalf, Thrain,
Thekk and Thorin, Thror, Vit and Lit,
Nyr and Nyrath-- now have I told--
Regin and Rathsvith-- the list aright.

Fili, Kili, Fundin, Nali,
Heptifili, Hannar, Sviur,
Frar, Hornbori, Fraeg and Loni,
Aurvang, Jari, Eikinskjalldi.

The race of the dwarfs in Dvalin's throng
Down to Lofar the list must I tell;
The rocks they left, and through wet lands
They sought a home in the fields of sand.

There were Draupnir and Dolgthrasir,
Hor, Haugspori, Hlevang, Gloin,
Dori, Ori, Duf, Andvari,
Skirfir, Virfir, Skafith, Ai.⁷

The list includes, besides Gandalf, names of eleven of the thirteen dwarfs in Thorin's company--twelve names in all because Thorin is also called Eikinskjalldi 'Oakenshield'--and of their relatives, Fundin, Nain, Thror, Thrain and Durin. Two dwarfs mentioned in The Lord of the Rings (III, 440-441) but not in The Hobbit have names derived from the Voluspá: Fror, son of Dain I, and Nar, an old companion of Thrain.

⁷ Henry Adams Bellows, The Poetic Edda (New York, 1936), pp. 6-8.

Though as Henry Adams Bellows points out, "most of the names presumably had some definite significance, as Northri, Suthri, Austri, and Vestri ("North," "South," "East," and "West"), . . . in many cases the interpretations are sheer guesswork" (pp. 6-7). Tolkien seems to have favored names of uncertain meaning, or perhaps he has merely chosen the shorter names, which are less explicit than the longer compounds. Durin, Dáin, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Nori Thrāin, Thorin, Thrór, Fili, Kili, Fundin, Gloin, Dori, and Ori have no clear meanings in Old Norse. Olive Bray glosses Nār and Nāin as "corpse-like" and "death-like,"⁸ and this seems appropriate, for terrible experiences are related about them. Nār, who witnesses the Orcs' mutilation of Thrór, is sent back, deliberately spared as a messenger, to bear the news which starts a terrible war between the Orcs and Dwarfs (III, 441-442); and Nāin is killed in single combat with the Orc-chief Azog in the final battle of that war (III, 443). Frór, slain "by a great cold-drake" (III, 440), recalls ON frógrinn 'to freeze'. Dwalin is derived from ON dvala 'to delay', and Bray translates his name as "Dallier" (p. 281), but his character in The Hobbit seems neither obstructive nor procrastinating. One episode which Tolkien assigns to Thorin Oakenshield seems a play at explaining the Norse compound Eikinskjalði 'Oak Shield': in battle Thorin cut a branch of oak to replace his broken shield. "In this way he got his name" (III, 443).

Snorri Sturluson quotes the dwarf list in his Prose Edda with slight changes, notably the omission of Thrāin and Thrór, and the

⁸Olive Bray, ed., The Elder or Poetic Edda . . . , I (London, 1908), 281.

inclusion of Óinn.⁹ Dāin, Ori, and Dori are mentioned in The Poetic Edda as craftsmen: Dain as one of the two who forged Freyr's boar with golden bristles,¹⁰ and Ori and Nori among the nine who helped Loki make Lyr, a flame-encompassed hall.¹¹ But Dvalin is by far the most famous of dwarfs. His name is used as a synonym for dwarf in a verse quoted by Snorri (p. 104), three times in The Poetic Edda. The sun, for instance, which traditionally turns dwarfs to stone, is called "The Deceiver of Dvalin,"¹² and Norns of dwarfish descent are called "Dvalin's daughters."¹³ The most interesting reference to Dvalin appears in a corrupt version of The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, which J.R.R. Tolkien's son, Christopher, translates as an appendix to his volume of that name, for not only does it include the only reference to Durin known to me outside of the dwarf lists but also several motifs important in The Hobbit: the iron-biting, rust-proof sword, dwarfs as highly skilled craftsmen, and the invisible dwar-door in a rock, which is open at sunset. Riding deep into the forest, the saga relates, King Svafrlami encountered at sunset two dwarfs beside a great stone. Holding his sword so they could not re-enter the stone, he learned that they were Durin and Dvalin and he charged them to make a gold-ornamented sword that would cut anything, never rust, and always bring victory. Otherwise they would

⁹ Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, (New York, 1929), p. 26.

¹⁰ Bellows, p. 220.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 247.

¹² Ibid., p. 188.

¹³ Ibid., p. 375.

die. Dwalin delivered the sword at the appointed time, but pronounced a curse on his handiwork just before leaping to the safety of the stone. The sword would kill a man every time it was drawn, perform three hateful deeds, and finally be the death of King Svfrlami himself.¹⁴

Of all the dwarfs named in The Hobbit, only Balin does not appear in any Old Norse dwarf list, and he is the one most warmly characterized, the dwarfs' watchman and Bilbo's closest friend. It is not clear why Tolkien chose the name, except that it rhymes with Dwalin, the most famous of dwarfs, and the two are seen regularly together. Dwalin arrives at Bilbo's hole first, Balin second, in The Hobbit (pp. 20-21), and Balin and Dwalin accompanied Thorin Oakenshield's father on an abortive earlier attempt to kill the dragon (III, 446). Balin is the tragic hero of a section of Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur, which does involve a wizard, a wonderful sword, an invisible knight, and a quest. Balin's name may be derived from ON böl 'misfortune' or, perhaps, bāl 'fire'. The latter seems more appropriate for a metal-working dwarf, particularly when it is noticed that Balin is the sharpest-eyed of dwarfs in The Hobbit and that one of the names given Odin in the Grimnismol is Báleygr, which Olive Bray glosses as "flaming-eyed" (p. 297). But this is not very satisfactory, for Odin is no dwarf, flaming eyes are not necessarily sharp, and Balin is never particularly associated with fire. Tolkien may have set the most gracious of Thorin's company deliberately apart by giving him a name with Arthurian overtones and without explicit reference

¹⁴ Christopher Tolkien, trans., The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise (London, 1960), p. 68.

to dictionary or dwarf list.

The names of other dwarfs not in the Voluspá or Snorri's Edda seem to be grounded firmly in Old Norse vocabulary. Grœr and Grœin suggest ON grār 'grey' and groenn 'green', which seem fitting in view of repeated references to a dwarf's particular color of dress in The Hobbit. Dís, "the only dwarf-woman named in these histories" (III, 449), is called by the Old Norse word meaning 'sister, goddess, angel, maid', and Farin seems named after ON farir 'to be in company with, journey'. Borin's name may reflect the dwarfs' propensity for tunneling, for bora means "to bore holes in." If so, it accords with Ryan's comment that Gimli, the most important dwarf in The Lord of the Rings, "must suggest 'gimlet', an appropriate notion of boring for a delver and rock-cutter."¹⁵ But since the other dwarf names have been traced to Old Norse, and "gimlet" is derived from Old French, it seems more likely that the name is related to ON gimstein 'jewel' and may mean "gem-like." In the Voluspá Gimlê appears, not as the name of a dwarf, but of a mountain on which, in a fair, gold-roofed hall, righteous rulers will dwell forever.¹⁶ Association with this semblance of a Celtic other-world is particularly appropriate for Gimli, platonic lover of the elf-queen Galadriel, companion of Legolas the wood elf, and Lord of the Glittering Caves (III, 451). He is the only dwarf ever to sail to the Undying Lands in the West. Olive Bray observes that many have translated Gimlê as "Jeweled," but asserts, in an etymology which I am unable to verify, that it

¹⁵"German Mythology Applied," p. 51.

¹⁶Bellows, p. 26.

means "Fire-sheltered realm" from ON gim 'fire' and hlē 'shelter'.¹⁷ Both "Jeweled" and "Fire-sheltered" have applicability to the Lord of the Glittering Caves, who finally journeys to a land sheltered from the fires of mutability, dying, and decay.

UNCERTAIN DERIVATIONS

I have already (p. 33-34) identified Bilbo's name with ME bil-bōie 'sword boy' and shown some internal evidence for this. But the Old English word, bilewit 'innocent, honest, gentle, merciful', opens up a new etymology which would, it seems, connect Bilbo with a character in Saxo Grammaticus' Danish History. King Sigar is said to have conducted all his affairs with the help of two counselors, who were of such different temperaments that "one used to reconcile folk who were at feud, while the other loved to sunder in hatred those who were bound by friendship." Their names were Bilwis and Bolwis.¹⁸ Since Bilbo certainly tries to reconcile feuding folk in The Hobbit, and since he is honest, merciful, and gentel, it is possible to relate Bilbo to a hypothetical form *bil-bōg 'arm of mercy' or some other form related to Bilewit.¹⁹

The Goblins of The Hobbit, called Orcs in The Lord of the Rings, sometimes have names derived from Old English or Old Norse or, at least, echoing Modern English words so derived. Bolg of the North,

¹⁷Bray, p. 297.

¹⁸Saxo, pp. 279-282.

¹⁹Cf. Hobbit, pp. 92-93, and I, 92. Perhaps Tolkien was thinking of the Slavic god of light, Byelboy, who helps travelers out of dark forests and bestows wealth and fertility, see Frank Chapin Bray's Dictionary, p. 41.

the Goblin King at the Battle of Five Armies, is associated by Ryan with OE belȝan 'to cause oneself to swell with anger' (p. 50). Hall's dictionary defines the word as "to be or to become angry," and it seems related to OE belȝ 'bag', the source of belly.²⁰ Similarly, alimentary and unpleasant associations cling to Bolg's father, Azog, who suggests OE asūcan 'to suck, drain, consume', and to the northern orc-hold of Gundabad, composed of OE gund 'pus' and a second element, perhaps either abidan 'to abide' (the source of abode) or abitan 'to devour'. In any case, the final syllable bad colors its connotation. Snaga in The Lord of the Rings resembles OE snaca 'snake', whereas Gorbag suggests the combination of OE gor 'dung' and ON baggi 'bundle'. Shagrat is related to OE seacga 'rough hair, wool' and raet 'rat', Uglūk to ON ugǫligr 'fearful'. Lugbūrz, the orkish name for Mordor, suggests OE lēagan (pret. pl. lūgon) 'to lie' and perhaps byres 'tool'. Names in Rohan are derived consistently from Old English, dwarfish names consistently from Old Norse, but orkish names are spasmodically and inconsistently related to both tongues. The spelling is modern in Shagrat, partly modernized in Gorbag, and quite archaic in Bolg and Azog. Bolg, Snaga, and Azog seem derived from Old English, Uglūk from Old Norse, and Gorbag from both; and Grishnākh, another orc name, seems unrelated to either language. Perhaps this is to be expected from creatures who "quickly developed as many barbarous dialects as there were groups

²⁰ Bolg may also reflect the Firbolgs, the grotesque tribe of foes of the Irish Tuatha De Danaan, the Shee-folk who resemble Tolkien's elves. And "A Champion of the eastern part of the world" named Bolg is said to have made Cuchulain's spear, the Gae Bulg. See Lady Gregory, trans., Cuchulain of Muirthemne (London, 1902), p. 45.

or settlements of their race" (III, 511), but the only feature orc names seem to have in common is their being nonsense words with pejorative connotations. The connotations seem arrived at largely by resurrecting earlier forms of unpleasant modern words (*Snaga*) or by forming compounds from modern elements (*Shagrat*). There may be Germanic philology behind them, but they are clearly selected for their suggestiveness to the modern reader. No scholarship is needed to see "bulge," "ugly," and "snake" in *Bolg*, *Uglúk*, and *Snaga*, respectively.

Tolkien glosses *Glamdring* and *Orcrist*, the two ancient swords from the trolls' hoard, as "Foe-hammer" and "Goblin-cleaver," but these seem to be what their names mean in some form of Elvish, the language invented by Tolkien, not in any historical tongue. That Old English and Old Norse have no words resembling *Glamdring* and meaning "Foe-hammer" is no reason to cease looking for Germanic sources of the name, however, for many of Tolkien's "Elvish" names closely parallel Germanic words that have meanings appropriate to the thing named. He says quite explicitly that *Orthanc*, for instance, means "Mount Fang" in Elvish and "The Cunning Mind" in Old English. *Mordor* is, in Elvish, a compound of *Mor-* 'black', which appears in *Moria* 'the Black Pit' (I, 370) and *Morthond* 'Blackroot Vale' (III, 49), and *-dor*, which appears in such place names as *Eriador* and *Gondor*, but *Mordor* also reflects OE *morðor* 'murder'. *Glamdring* may be coined from ON *glam* 'din, clash' and *drengr* 'warrior', which parallel ME *glam* and *dreng*, but it may also have to do with OE *glæm* 'light, splendor'. The latter interpretation is supported by the sword's power to emit light whenever foes are near and suggests the Old English kennings *hildelēoma*

and beadolōra, both of which designate "sword" and mean literally "battle-light." The first element in Orcrist is Tolkien's name for Goblin, derived from Latin through Old English, and the second may be a form of OE hrisian 'to shake, clatter', which would support by analogy the glam 'din' derivations of Glamdring; but hrist, third person singular of hrēosan 'to fall, go to ruin, attack', seems more likely. Orcrist might be a compressed form of "Goblins he attacks."

Among minor names in The Hobbit, Galion and Gram, the Elf-King's butler and the site of the Battle of Greenfields, are relatively clear reflections of OE galian 'to be wanton' and gram 'cruel, angry, fierce', but there are rich but imprecise suggestions in Bladorthin and Esgaroth. Bladorthin, a king (long since dead) for whom many cunningly inlaid spears in Thorin's halls were made, is an Ozymandias-figure and appropriately echoes OE blāed 'glory, riches' and oðian 'to long for'. But OE blāed (ON blað) 'blade' also deserves attention when combined with Oðinn, the Norse god whose particular weapon is the spear. Indeed, it is possible that King Bladorthin, like the historical Harald Finehair, is one of Odin's blað 'offspring'.²¹ The name certainly suggests "bladder-thin," which fits the frail vessel whose power was broken long before, but whose proud spears lie unused in a dragon's cave. Esgaroth, the lake town, is equally suggestive: -garoth may reflect ON garð and OE geard 'enclosure, dwelling', in which case it parallels Isengard. The first element may be OE āes (ME ēs) 'carrion, food', OE ōs 'a god', or OE īs 'ice'. That the town, driven over water by the dragon's devourings, is finally destroyed by his falling onto

²¹ Turville-Petre, p. 68.

it and rotting beneath the water suggests the appropriateness of āes (hence ME ēs-garð), and Is is found on most northern lakes; but the only reason for noticing OE os-geard is that it exactly parallels ON Asgarð, the abode of the gods. Anyone familiar with Old English will notice the very common gar 'spear' and oð 'up to', and perhaps some construction based on āes, gar and oð is suggested here. Because the town was once built on the shore, its name may reflect OE gāra 'cape, promontory'.

DERIVATIONS NOT FROM NORSE OR ENGLISH

Bilbo's mother's name, Belladonna (It. 'Fine Lady'), establishes that some names in The Hobbit have derivations from languages other than English and Norse. Gondolin, the elf city, excites echoes of Italian gondola,²² though it may also be related to the first element in Gandalf. The "heady vintage of the great gardens of Dorwinion" is potent enough "to make a wood elf drowsy" (Hobbit, p. 173). From this single pointed reference, it seems probable that Dorwinion is a portmanteau word composed of dormant (L. dormire 'to sleep'), wine (OE wīn, from L. vinum), and dominion (L. dominium) and means something like "the kingdom of sleep-producing wine." Carrock, specifically said to be the word for a large stone in Beorn's language (p. 117), resembles OE carr 'stone', but it is more like the Welsh careg 'stone' and Gaelic carraig 'a headland, a cliff, a rock jutting into the sea'. Though nowhere near the sea, Beorn's Carrock

²²That Tolkien associated gondolas with elvish ships--and possibly elvish cities with romantic Venice--is indicated in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, where an elvish hero "built a gilded gondola/to wander in" (p. 24). The elvish "Last Ship" on which Fíriel does not depart is said to have "golden beak and oar/and timbers white" (p. 62), and the illustration on page 64 shows something very like a gondola.

juts into The Great River and is a major landmark. When the Irish children of Lir see a storm approaching, they agree to rejoin if separated at "Carraig na Ron, the Rock of Seals."²³ The Oxford English Dictionary lists carr with the meaning of 'rock' and indicates that it is "now especially applied to insulated rocks off the Northumbrian and Scottish coasts," objects much like Beorn's Carrock except that they are in salt water.

CONCLUSION

Many names in Tolkien's fiction, particularly those in the kingdom of Rohan, are based on words in Old English, and these are usually based on common vocabulary words rather than on proper names. Often the reader may sense the meaning of the old word on which the name is based, and Tolkien seems to use the reader's ability to hear, however muffled by centuries of sound changes, the mood of a modern word in its ancestor--the bear in Beorn, for example. Most of Tolkien's dwarfs are given names from the lists of dwarf names in the Eddas, and since Old Norse is used regularly only in the naming of dwarfs, most names of Norse derivation are based on proper names, but the several dwarf names not traceable to any name list seem to be based on Old Norse words also. Balin is an interesting exception to this. In contrast to the groups of names clearly derived from names or other words in English or Norse, Bilbo, Glamdring, Orcrist, Bladorthin, and Esgaroth seem to suggest several appropriate Old English words but do not have clearly identifiable etymologies, and the names of Tolkien's goblins appear sometimes to be based on English or Norse but are not

²³Lady Gregory, trans., Gods and Fighting Men (London, 1913), p. 149.

derived by any consistent process. Belladona, Gondolin, Dorwinion, and Carrock seem to be derived from Italian, Italian, Latin, and Gaelic, respectively, but belladonna is a Modern English word, and the others resemble modern words with appropriate meanings.

Chapter Four

Wizards, Trolls, and Elvish Blades

In the first part of The Hobbit, Bilbo is recruited by Gandalf into an unexpected adventure which progresses uneventfully until the adventurers are caught and almost eaten by three giant trolls. After Gandalf rescues them, they discover in the trolls' treasure cave three marvelous swords which serve them well during the rest of the adventure. If there is a single protagonist in Tolkien's Middle-earth fiction, he is Gandalf, who knows more than anyone else about the many parts of the great struggle which, though not resolved until The Lord of the Rings, is already underway in The Hobbit and who is undivided in his opposition to the forces of darkness. There is no one source for this complex and powerful character, but he is a composite of features drawn, not only from the wizards in medieval heroic literature, but from the ancient Norse gods themselves, and his complexity is best understood by assuming that he is something like a god but has assumed the role of a mortal wizard. An analysis of Tolkien's scholarship, particularly of medieval sources mentioned in the essay "On Fairy-stories," has indicated that his strongest interests lie in Old Norse, Old English, Middle English, and Celtic heroic literature. Several critics have suggested that he may have been influenced by the Italian Romantic Epic which, though not strictly medieval, is a direct outgrowth of a medieval tradition with which modern literature has all but lost contact. Consequently, Orlando Furioso and Jerusalem Delivered have been examined along with a selection of medieval Norse, English and Celtic heroic stories in the attempt to trace some of the sources

which fed Tolkien's imagination.

WIZARDS

The Norse god Odin is an ambiguous figure. Old and immensely wise, he gave life to men and bestowed many gifts, including knowledge of poetry and runes, upon gods and men. The Father of white magic,¹ he often appeared in the guise of an old man to help his favorites. But he also practiced a perverse form of magic which caused death, misfortune, sickness, and insanity;² and, as the god of war, dissension and the dead, "he delighted especially in fratricidal strife and in conflict between kinsmen."³ So Odin, the High God, who is descended both from the fair primeval man, Buri, and from fell giants,⁴ is a morally ambiguous figure. Those who censure Tolkien for moral simplism seem themselves to have simplified him, for, though he indicates whether persons end up on the side of Sauron or the Valar, he portrays many kinds and degrees of good and evil, and his characters are seldom incorruptible or wholly base.⁵ But there are two moral sides in Middle-earth, and no place for a figure representing the extremes of both; hence it is not surprising that the Promethean and Plutonian faces of Odin become separated in Tolkien's fiction, the former falling primarily on Gandalf, the latter on his Enemy, Sauron.

¹ E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North (New York, 1964), p. 64.

² Ibid., p. 65.

³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴ Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York, 1929), p. 19.

⁵ This point is discussed in Noreen Hayes and Robert Renshaw, "Of Hobbits," Critique, Studies in Modern Fiction, IX (1967), 58.

The clearest indication that Tolkien intended an association between Odin and Sauron is his mention of "Odin the Goth, the Necromancer, glutter of crows, Lord of the Slain," in Tree and Leaf (p. 31), for he refers to Sauron as "the Necromancer" throughout The Hobbit and early in The Lord of the Rings (I, 328). It is not inappropriate to think of Sauron as a god. He is immortal, like Odin, unless the ring's magic is broken, and he has the makings of a god of the dead, of war, and of strife between kinsmen. Though Sauron's subjects are technically alive, there is a suggestion of death about them: Mordor implies "murder"; his captains are the wraiths of ancient kings kept alive by his magic; his principal subjects are a race named after the Latin god of the dead Orcus, probably transmitted through OE orcneas 'monsters, hell-corpses';⁶ and his polluted, broken, black, wraith-ruled domain recalls the underworld which Thorkillius visits in Saxo's Danish History, "a gloomy neglected town looking more like an exhaled vapor," where shrieking, misshapen phantoms move in a street of reeking mire, a begrimed palace full of snakes is ruled by three old women with broken backbones, and so on through many hideous and Mordor-like details.⁷ Certainly Sauron qualifies as a patron of war by turning his realm into a military camp and initiating the War of the Ring, and strife between kinsmen is routine among those under his sway. His orcs, like the trolls in The Hobbit, tend to

⁶ See John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, rev. C.L. Wrenn (London, 1967), p. 183.

⁷ Saxo, pp. 348-350. Christopher Tolkien discusses this passage in an appendix to The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, p. 84, and there can be little doubt that this land, beyond a channel which "divided the world of men from the world of monsters," influenced his father's picture of the Morgul Valley and or Mordor.

destroy themselves by quarreling: Merry and Pippin escape in The Two Towers because of bloody treachery in their orkish captors, Sam can rescue Frodo early in The Return of the King because most of the orcs in the guard-tower have slain one another, and later the hobbits overhear an argument between two orcs, one of whom kills the other (III, 248-249).⁸ Corruption by Sauron or his Ring leads Sméagol to murder Déagol (I, 85), Saruman to betray Gandalf (I, 340-341), and Denethor to try to burn his son alive (III, 153).

But these Odin-like qualities might be expected from any black sorcerer, any villainous demi-god, and equally strong parallels could be drawn between Sauron and Satan, Ahriman, Set, or Shiva. There are more precise resemblances between Sauron and Odin's Plutonian face. Both Odin and Sauron are very powerful, and their power is based on knowledge gained at the expense of eye and limb. Sauron learned to make the One Ring by studying elvish smiths, and his single-minded effort to impose his own will on what he sees, his search for "useful" knowledge, seems represented by his one-eyed stare, fiery, glazed, empty and inflexible. Eyes glowing from the darkness are introduced in The Hobbit as signs of evil creatures (p. 141), and the only part of Sauron ever seen, except for his giant wraith as the wind blows him to oblivion (III, 279), is his one burning eye. Frodo sees it in Galadriel's mirror--"The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing" (I, 471)--and he feels it from the high seat on Amon Hen (I, 519). Pippin sees it

⁸The discord within the forces of Mordor suggests the role of the goddess "Discord" among the pagan armies in Orlando Furioso.

in the Palantir (II, 252-253), and the orcs in Sauron's service wear the emblem of "the Red Eye" (II, 21). The Eye has a hypnotic power to impress its will on anyone who looks into it, even through a seeing-stone or elf-pool, so it is one of Sauron's main weapons, the traditional "evil eye." In the Grimnismol Odin is called Flæyg 'The Flaming Eyed,'⁹ and he is often said to be one-eyed,¹⁰ so that battle dead are called "Spoil for the Single Eyed."¹¹ Snorri mentions a tradition that Odin left his eye at Mimir's Well as a pledge to procure a drink of the waters of wisdom and understanding.¹² Just as Sauron can see marvelous distances from his dark tower, Odin "saw every man's acts, and knew all things which he saw" when he sat in his high seat at Hlidskjalf.¹³ Odin also gained wisdom by hanging on "the windy tree" for nine nights while wounded with a spear,¹⁴ and Sauron's ring finger was cut off after his first defeat.

Gandalf has many of Odin's other characteristics. The wizard appears in Tolkien's fiction as "a little old man with a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which a white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots." His "long bushy eyebrows" protrude beyond the brim of his "shady hat"¹⁵ and he carries

⁹ Henry Adams Bellows, trans. The Poetic Edda (New York, 1936), p. 103.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Margaret Schlauch, trans., The Saga of the Volsungs (New York, 1949), pp. 49, 77, and 181.

¹¹ Prose Edda, p. 99.

¹² Ibid., 27.

¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴ Poetic Edda, p. 60.

¹⁵ Hobbit, p. 17.

a magic staff.¹⁶ Among Odin's names in the Grimnismol are Sithhott 'With Broad Hat', Sithkegg 'Long-Bearded', Gondlir 'Wand-Bearer', and Harbarth 'Greybeard',¹⁷ and he often appears to men in a guise like Gandalf's.¹⁸ Favours bestowed and withdrawn by Odin underlie The Saga of the Volsungs, where the god appears as a hoary old man, appearing suddenly in garments like those Gandalf wears in his unexpected appearance in Fangorn: a tattered cloak, a hood and, over the hood, a wide-brimmed hat (II, 122). Odin goes out of the hall in the Saga, "and none knew who he was or where he went,"¹⁹ but he comes again unexpectedly to help or hinder the Volsungs. Gandalf disappears without the dwarfs noticing in the troll episode²⁰ and in the goblin cave,²¹ but he reappears when needed after these disappearances and just before the Battle of the Five Armies.²² Pippin says much later that Gandalf "always turns up when things seem darkest" (III, 100). Odin reappears to the Volsungs as a man in a wide hat and blue cape,²³

¹⁶ Hobbit, p. 20.

¹⁷ Poetic Edda, pp. 103-104.

¹⁸ According to Margaret Schlauch, Romance in Iceland (New York, 1934), p. 22, "When Odin appeared in human guise to help his friends or thwart his friends' foes, he usually wore the semblance of a tall, venerable old man with one eye, whose laconic speech revealed great wisdom, wide experience, and extensive wanderings over the face of the earth." Besides the Volsunga Saga, works cited in which Odin so appears include the Harðar saga Grímkelssonar, where the old man wears a blue cloak, and Hrólfs saga Kraka.

¹⁹ Volsungs, p. 49.

²⁰ Hobbit, pp. 43-44.

²¹ Ibid., p. 68.

²² Ibid., p. 258.

²³ Volsungs, p. 77.

and as an old man with a long beard.²⁴ The visits which lead to the death of one of the Volsungs²⁵ represent Odin's Plutonian face, which Tolkien has transferred to Sauron, but the Plutonian Odin is said to be one-eyed but not long-bearded, the Promethean Odin long-bearded but seldom one-eyed. When long-bearded Odin helps Sigurd choose the best horse, a grey one, from the stock of King Hjalprek,²⁶ we have a probable source of Gandalf's choosing the best horse, a grey one, from the stock of King Theoden. Both horses have marvelous power and will let none but their masters ride them,²⁷ but more significant is Odin's statement that Sigurd's grey is sprung from Sleipnir, his own marvelous eight-legged steed, for Gandalf's Shadowfax is one of a semi-divine breed of horses descended from a legendary sire: "Men said of them that Bēma . . . must have brought their sire from West over Sea" (III, 431). Identification, though at a slant, between Shadowfax and Sleipnir strengthens the tie between their owners, both of whom ride into places where horses normally refuse to go: Odin into Nilfheim, Gandalf against the Nazguls (III, 99). Also in Gandalf's ride from Isengard to Minas Tirith (II, 257, 262) there is a strong suggestion of Odin's ride to Nilfheim in Baldrs Draumar:

Then Odin rose, the enchanter old,
And the saddle he laid on Sleipnir's back.²⁸

But Pippin's ride "wrapped in a cloak and blanket" (II, 256) with

²⁴Volsungs, p. 77 and 181.

²⁵Ibid., p. 77 and 181.

²⁶Ibid., p. 84.

²⁷Lord of the Rings, II, 46 and 138; Volsungs, pp. 125-126.

²⁸Poetic Edda, p. 196.

Gandalf on the back of Shadowfax resembles more Hadding's ride across the sea in Saxo, where the young prince cowers under Odin's mantle on the back of Sleipnir.²⁹ Shadowfax owes his name to several Old Norse horses: Skinfaxi 'Shining-Mane', who draws in the dawn,³⁰ Hrimfaxi 'Frosty-Mane', who leads down night,³¹ and Gullfaxi 'Gold-Mane', whom the giant Hrongnir races against Sleipnir.³²

Gandalf resembles Odín at several other points. Gandalf is quoted as having said, "Many are my names in many countries. Mithrandir among Elves, Tharkûn to the Dwarfs; Olórin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten, in the South Incānus, in the North Gandalf; to the East I go not" (II, 353). This passage parallels Odin's catalogue of names in the Grimnismol, where a blue-cloaked stranger tortured by King Geirröth declares:

A single name have I never had
Since first among men I fared.

Grimnir they call me in Geirröth's hall,
With Asmund Jalk am I;
Kjalar I was when I went in a sledge,
At the council Thrór I am called
As Bithur I fare to the fight;
Oski, Biflindi, Jafnhor and Omi,³³
Gondlir and Harbarth midst gods.

Just as Odin uses a descriptive pseudonym for each adventure among men,³⁴ Tolkien's wizards, "revealed their true names to few, but used

²⁹ Saxo, p. 29.

³⁰ Poetic Edda, p. 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³² Prose Edda, p. 115.

³³ Poetic Edda, p. 104.

³⁴ Turville-Petre, p. 62.

such names as were given to them" (III, 455).

As magician and god of war, Odin can render his enemies powerless in battle,³⁵ so he is depicted as carrying a spear but seems to wear no armor, even striding through the thick of combat.³⁶ In the Hovamol he lists the magical songs he knows:

A third I know, if great is my need
Of fetters to hold my foe;
Blunt do I make mine enemy's blade
Nor bite his sword or staff.³⁷

Gandalf carries a sword but wears no armor (II, 161), and his behavior at the worst moment in The Battle of the Five Armies suggests that his power lies not in material weapons, for he is "sitting on the ground as if in deep thought, preparing, I suppose, some last blast of magic before the end."³⁸ When Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas mistake him for Saruman in Fangorn, Gandalf displays an Odin-like power to fetter attackers. He merely lifts his staff and the dwarf's axe falls to the ground; the man's sword hangs motionless (II, 124). "Indeed, my friends," Gandalf reassures them, "none of you has any weapon that could hurt me" (II, 125).³⁹ Gandalf's knowledge of songs of fetters

³⁵Turville-Petre, p. 74.

³⁶Volsungs, p. 77.

³⁷Poetic Edda, p. 64. Stanzas 147-165 of the Hovamol seem part of the background of Tom Bombadil, who also has many names (I, 347) and sings his way out of predicaments in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. He and Odin employ what the OE charm against a swarm of bees calls Öa micelan mannes tungan 'the mighty tongue of man'. See George Philip Krapp and Arthur Garfield Kennedy, An Anglo-Saxon Reader (New York, 1929), p. 140.

³⁸Hobbit, p. 270.

³⁹H.R. Ellis Davidson cites occurrences of herfjoturr 'warfetters' in Harthar Saga and Ynglinga Saga in her Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, p. 63-64.

is more explicit when he puts a "shutting spell" on the door to Balin's tomb in Moria (I, 424).

Both Odin and Gandalf undergo death and rebirth. Odin hangs on Yggdrasil for nine days to learn the "runes" of wisdom from Bölthorn,⁴⁰ his giant maternal grandfather.⁴¹ Since the giants are enemies of the gods and, according to Turville-Petre, "may be seen as the devouring demons of death, and even as the dead themselves,"⁴² Odin's wisdom is gained by a shamanistic death and communion with the spirits of the dead; and his nine days' hanging may be associated with a verse in the Vafthruthnismol:

Of the runes of gods and the giants' race
The truth indeed can I tell,
for every world have I won;
To nine worlds came I, to Niflhel beneath,
The home where dead men dwell.⁴³

When Gandalf falls with the Balrog into the depths of Khazad-dûm, to an underwater encounter resembling Beowulf's fight with the sea-fishes,⁴⁴ they fight a ten-day-long battle which ends with the monster's destruction and Gandalf's "passing away" (II, 134-135; III, 465). After many days, he awakens and is rescued, but he has been purified by his passage through death, burned from grey to white; his eyes shine like the sun (II, 125) and he holds "a power beyond the strength of kings" (II, 133). In their shamanistic descents, Odin

⁴⁰ Poetic Edda, p. 61.

⁴¹ Prose Edda, p. 19.

⁴² Turville-Petre, p. 49.

⁴³ Poetic Edda, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Mē tō grunde tēah
fāh fēondscaða, faeste haefde
grim on grāpe (ll. 553-555).

meets Bölthorn, Gandalf the Balrog. Bölthorn is Odin's grandfather, and, in view of the phonetic similarity between the two monsters' names, it seems reasonable to look for some kind of kinship between the Balrog and Gandalf. The Balrog, who is heralded by the Orkish word ghâsh 'fire', is clearly a fire demon and peculiarly Gandalf's enemy, for the wizard says after their first meeting that he has "never felt such a challenge" (I, 425). The reason for this is that both are strong in the power of fire. Gandalf bears the elvish Ring of Fire (III, 45), and the Balrog wields "dark fire"; Gandalf is the "flame of Arnor," the northern kingdom of the Dūnedain, and the Balrog is the "flame of Udûn," the valley behind Sauron's gate (I, 429). The relationship is a close but antagonistic one, rather like the one I have suggested between Bilbo and Smaug, the kinship between opposites. Ryan derives Balrog from OE bealu 'evil',⁴⁵ but since the fire demon first rose among dwarfs who, as has been demonstrated, have names derived from Old Norse, he is more probably named after ON bāl 'fire'. The second element in the name may be rök 'creation, marvel, doom' or rókr 'twilight', both of which may be appropriate as they appear in ragnarök 'the doom of the gods' and ragnarókr 'the twilight of the gods', two names for the end of the world, when Odin and the Aesir face devouring monsters at the rainbow bridge to Asgard and die as a prelude to the renewed earth's rebirth.

Comparison between Gandalf's fight on the bridge and the Norse Armageddon suggests parallels between the wizard and Norse gods other than Odin. Heimdall's similar name and his function as bridge-ward

⁴⁵Ryan, p. 50.

and storm-crow have already been noticed (p. 17, above). Guarding Bifröst at the edge of heaven, he fights the evil god-giant Loki, and, like Gandalf and the Balrog, they kill one another.⁴⁶ Snorri calls Heimdall "the White God,"⁴⁷ and it has been suggested that the god is related to the Indian fire god Agni and the Persian sun god Mithra.⁴⁸ The wizard's names, Gandalf, Incānus, and Mithrandir, resemble Heimdall, Agni, and Mithra sufficiently to suggest that Tolkien may have been aware of these theories and used them to coin the names. The chief Norse analogue to the Balrog is Surt, a fire demon who at Ragnarök will attack Bifröst wielding a sword more radiant than the sun, followed by an orc-like host from the fire-realm Muspell ("and both before and after him burning fire").⁴⁹ When he crosses the rainbow bridge, it will break.⁵⁰ The fiery Balrog, leading an army of orcs and trolls, bears "a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire" (I, 428), and, of course, the Bridge of Khazad-dûm breaks under him (I, 430).⁵¹ Identification between the Balrog and Surt disrupts, however, the parallel between Gandalf and Heimdall, for the adversary of Surt is Frey, not Heimdall, and Surt is the victor at Ragnarök. In Gandalf, Tolkien has combined laudable traits of Odin with elements derived from other gods, particularly Heimdall and Frey, both of whom are mentioned in Tree and Leaf. There may even be some of Thor,

⁴⁶ Prose Edda, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁸ Davidson, p. 172.

⁴⁹ Prose Edda, pp. 78-79.

⁵⁰ Poetic Edda, p. 378.

⁵¹ An interesting detail is the horn blast that Boromir, the

the other Norse god mentioned there, in the wizard. They both fight monsters, and the thunder god's hammer, which represents lightning, resembles Gandalf's fire-shooting staff. Gandalf's "bushy eye-brows, and his quick temper, and his voice," which Frodo misses in Lothlórien (I, 376), are characteristics of the wide-travelling Thor, who need only stare at the husbandman whose son has crippled his goat to intimidate the poor man: "he looked at the eyes, then it seemed to him that he must fall down before their glances alone."⁵² And it is Thor who keeps the dwarf Alvis talking until sunrise turns him to stone,⁵³ an episode closely paralleling Gandalf's treatment of the trolls in The Hobbit (p. 51).

Eddic and early saga literature describes magical feats performed by gods, but it is to Celtic and Romantic sources we must look for tales of ordinary wizards. Tolkien's wizards are not actually men, but "came out of the Far West and were messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron" (III, 455). Because he came from the Undying Lands, Gandalf may be one of the "Lords of the West" native to a changeless paradise, a Heaven or Fairyland, which was "removed forever from the circles of the world" by the Lucifer-like pride and trespass of the last king of Numenor (II, 392). As a superhuman, even super-elvish, agent sent "in the shape of Men" to lead men out of darkness (III, 455), Gandalf may be identified with the angels of biblical story and with Krishna and the other avatars of the Preserver, Vishnu, who is periodically incarnate to reveal the cosmic order. Because there are several wizards, identification between Christ and Gandalf can be

⁵² Prose Edda, p. 58.

⁵³ Poetic Edda, p. 194.

only partial, but there are many similarities; and, in the Christian framework, the wizard seems both a heavenly messenger (angel) and a prophet. Further interpretation of Gandalf in terms of Christian, Hindu, and Zoroastrian religion would probably be fruitful, but it is not particularly relevant to The Hobbit. Whatever he may incarnate (Lin Carter discusses the problem in pp. 191-194), Gandalf appears in The Hobbit and in much of The Lord of the Rings to be no more than a durable old man with "many powers of mind and hand" (III,455).

Certainly the most famous wizard in medieval fiction is Merlin, who is, like Gandalf, the trusted advisor of kings and a necessary catalyst leading to the coronation of the unknown heir to the high kingship. Gandalf rouses King Theoden of the Mark to battle and assumes leadership of the armies of Gondor in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, and it is his plan which leads to the destruction of the One Ring and the subsequent ascension of Aragorn to the throne of Gondor and the Kingship of Middle-earth. Gandalf, by bringing help just in time at Helm's Deep, saves the lives of King Theoden and of Aragorn. Merlin engineers Arthur's conception, education, and coronation, and dominates his decisions early in Le Morte d'Arthur: he magically panders for Uther Pendragon,⁵⁴ and arranges for Arthur's rearing,⁵⁵ his discovery,⁵⁶ the vindication of his title,⁵⁷ and his defeat of rebellious nobles.⁵⁸ When King Pellinore is about to kill

⁵⁴ Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur (London, 1963), I, 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., I, 8-9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., I, 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I, 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., I, 16.

Arthur, Merlih saves his life by casting an enchanted sleep on his attacker.⁵⁹ Gandalf and Merlin both appear as old men,⁶⁰ and both are encountered "by adventure" in the guise of vagrants early in their respective stories,⁶¹ but there is little resemblance between the magic they practice, for Merlin specializes in oracular statements and dwimorcraft 'the art of illusions', which are Saruman's study in The Lord of the Rings and are practically absent from The Hobbit. Derived from the Welsh soothsayer Myrddin,⁶² Merlin functions as a supernatural oracle even in Malory, where he predicts the kinds and causes of his and Arthur's deaths.⁶³ Bilbo's Gandalf is perceptive about character, has gained special knowledge in a perilous visit to the Necromancer's tower, knows about many odd people such as dwarfs and skin-changers, and is not easily lost in mountain paths and tunnels, but all his knowledge seems only what might be expected in a learned, far-travelled, and quick-witted man. But like Saruman, Merlin excels in the art of disguises and illusions. His art permits Uther to lie with the Duchess of Cornwall "in the likeness of her lord,"⁶⁴ and he appears himself in many guises: as a beggar,⁶⁵ as a hunting churl,⁶⁶ as a

⁵⁹Malory, I. 42.

⁶⁰Ibid., I. 36.

⁶¹Ibid., I. 6; Hobbit, pp. 14-15.

⁶²A.O.H. Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems," in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford, 1959), p. 20.

⁶³Malory, I. 37.

⁶⁴Ibid., I. 7.

⁶⁵Ibid., I. 6.

⁶⁶Ibid., I. 32.

child of fourteen years, and as a man of eighty.⁶⁷ Gandalf resembles a cloaked old man and is not recognized immediately when Bilbo meets him at Dale,⁶⁸ or when the Three Walkers meet him in Fangorn (II, 121-124), but the point in both cases seems to be that he is unexpected and plainly dressed, not that he has deliberately disguised himself. Gandalf does use ventriloquism in the troll episode⁶⁹ and seems to summon a storm at Edoras (II, 118-119), but there is little in him of the Welsh illusionary who can spell men to sleep⁷⁰ and so befog an enemy's sight that he may be passed by safely.⁷¹ Gandalf's summoning the forest of Huorns to aid men at Helm's Deep (II, 186-187, 223) resembles the Druid's raising a wood in the path of Naoise and his brothers,⁷² and two witches' putting "enchantment on the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth, till they become an armed host, and put terror on them and put them to the rout,"⁷³ but the Huorn-host is frankly tree-like and very real. "It is not wizardry, but a power far older" (II, 189). Merlin and the Druids deal in cunning deceptions, but Gandalf always deals in realities--at least the realities of Middle-

⁶⁷Malory, I. 36.

⁶⁸Hobbit, p. 258.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 51.

⁷⁰Malory, I. 42. This power is reserved for Tom Bombadil, who sends those who threaten him magically off to sleep in a cumulative formula which finally reads as follows in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, pp. 13-15, reprinted with original pagination in The Tolkien Reader:

Go back to grassy mound, on your stoney pillow
lay down your bony head, like Old Man Willow,
like young Goldberry, and Badger-folk in burrow!

⁷¹Ibid., I. 44.

⁷²Lady Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne (London, 1902), p. 113.

⁷³Lady Gregory, Gods and Fighting Men (London, 1913), p. 54.

earth.

Gandalf does have Merlin's ability to disappear suddenly and travel rapidly. Several times in Malory, Merlin vanishes "away suddenly" and, like Gandalf, reappears when things are at their worst, to end a battle,⁷⁴ for instance, or to rescue Balin from the ruins of King Pellam's castle.⁷⁵ When Merlin returns from an overseas diplomatic mission, Arthur and his allies "had great marvel, that man on earth might speed so soon, and go and come."⁷⁶ During the time that the dwarfs in The Hobbit spend toiling through Mirkwood, penetrating the Mountain, and fortifying their front hall, the wide-faring Gandalf attends a wizard council, drives Sauron from Mirkwood, passes through the forest, and joins the army of elves. The Lord of the Rings includes a more detailed account of one of Gandalf's journeys: astride Shadowfax, he rides from Rohan to Bree by way of Hobbiton, a distance of some nine hundred miles, in only a week (I, 344-345; III, 464). Essential to this feat, of course, is his marvelous horse--"tireless, swift as the flowing wind" (I, 344)--and there is a hint in Malory that Merlin may have a similar steed when he rides on a "great black horse."⁷⁷ Though both Gandalf and Merlin are wizards and the advisors of kings and have the craft of

⁷⁴ Malory, I. 31.

⁷⁵ Ibid., I. 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid., I. 21.

⁷⁷ Ibid., I. 31. Wolfram Von Eschenbach's Parzival has a red horse with similar powers, for "it took great exertion as nothing; cold weather or hot, over rocks or tree trunks, it never sweated in travel." Wolfram goes on to say that his hero rode farther, fully armed, in one day "than a sensible man, unarmed, would have ridden in two"; and later "the story tells us that on that day he rode so far that a bird could only with difficulty have flown all that way." The quotations are from Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage, trans., Parzival (New York, 1961), pp. 89 and 123.

departing unnoticed and faring quickly, the resemblance is not as great as might be expected: Gandalf suffers intensely but almost abstractly, and he never actually uses his magic for base ends or succumbs to ordinary temptations. Merlin, the baptized son of a devil,⁷⁸ magically panders for Uther Pendragon,⁷⁹ causes a slaughter of innocents by one prophecy,⁸⁰ and finally is buried alive because of his foolish efforts to seduce the lady Nimue.⁸¹ Merlin is a baptized devil, Gandalf an angel incarnate.

In Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered, which resembles Tolkien's fiction in its presentation of a war between two international forces, one good, one evil, there are two Saracen wizards and one Christian one. Dwimorcraft, which seems possible only with the help of the Prince of Illusions, Pluto, is practiced only by the evil Saracen wizards. Indeed, wizardry itself is such an unsuitable pursuit for a Christian that the good wizard is a pagan who has been converted by Peter the Hermit, and he works his magic, not by devilish means, but by application of natural wisdom:

The Lord forbid I use or charm or spell
 To raise foul Dis from his infernal seat;
 But of all herbs, of every spring and well,
 The hidden power I know and virtue great,
 And all that kind hath hid from mortal sight,
 And all the stars, their motions and their might.⁸²

⁷⁸Malory, I. 91.

⁷⁹Ibid., I. 7.

⁸⁰Ibid., I. 45.

⁸¹Ibid., I. 90.

⁸²Torquato Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered, trans. Edward Fairfax (New York, 1963), p. 293.

The distinction made between Merlin and Gandalf holds true between the Saracen and Christian wizards. Besides being able to call up devils and the dead,⁸³ to predict the future,⁸⁴ and to generate illusions,⁸⁵ Tasso's Saracen wizards have Gandalf's power to travel rapidly,⁸⁶ to pass through battle without armor,⁸⁷ to travel in mysterious underground tunnels,⁸⁸ to generate fire (however illusory),⁸⁹ and to impose battle-fetters.⁹⁰ Just as Gandalf and Saruman resemble one another, Tasso's wizards are similar in appearance: the evil Ismen appears to Soliman as a "grave and old" man with a staff,⁹¹ and the good wizard seems "an aged sire, grave and benign in show," carrying a rod in his right hand.⁹² Their outward forms resemble those of Gandalf, of Merlin, and even of Odin, and they share with these magicians a tendency to appear suddenly in time of need. Wizards with similar appearances are found in Orlando Furioso and The Faerie Queene: the black magician in the Second Book of Orlando seems "a weak old man, with beard along his breast,"⁹³

⁸³Tasso, p. 22-23.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 66.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 266, 365.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 210.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 211.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 270.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 205.

⁹²Ibid., p. 291.

⁹³Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. Sir John Harington, ed. Rudolf Gottfried (Bloomington, Indiana, 1966), p. 51.

and Spenser's Archimago first appears to be

An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray.⁹⁴

Sauron's dwimorcraft and the similar guises of Gandalf and Sauron are suggested in Orlando when Melissa, "by her well-tried skill in magic art," travels many miles on a magic steed to remind Rogero of his infidelity to Bradamant:

But straight she changed her shape and her array
That she Rogero better might beguile:
Her stature tall she makes, her head all gray;
A long white beard she takes to hide the wile;
In fine, she doth so cunningly dissemble⁹⁵
That she the old Atlanta doth resemble.

Melissa is a good enchantress, Atlanta an evil magician. Finally, Ariosto's Discord, who wears "weeds of sundry hue,"⁹⁶ may be the source of "Saruman of Many Colours" (I, 339).

There is no clear moral dichotomy in the Old Irish lays, but there are many wizards. They do not usually appear to be old men, but they have the power to bespell weapons, project flame, and create illusions, and they sometimes use magic wands. Curoi, son of Daire, who tests Cuchulain in an episode analogous to parts of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, appears as a tremendous troll-like man, but like Odin and Gandalf, he does not reveal his true name and he seems to have some power to bespell weapons and make them harmless, for he puts "spells on

⁹⁴ Edmund Spenser, Poetical Works, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London, 1966), p. 6.

⁹⁵ Ariosto, p. 163.

⁹⁶ Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. Harington, ed. Graham Hough (Carbondale, Illinois), p. 157. Unless specifically indicated all future references to Ariosto will be to Rudolf Gottfried's edition of Orlando rather than to Graham Hough's. Gottfried's includes only selections from the poem but it is a far less expensive and more widely available edition.

the edge of the axe" before he allows himself to be decapitated with it.⁹⁷ Aillen mac Midna, the black wizard of the Sidhe in a tale charmingly retold in James Stephens' Irish Fairy Tales, looks like a wraith, sings a sleep-inducing song like Tom Bombadil, and wields Gandalf-like flame: "The music ceased and Aillen hissed a fierce blue flame from his mouth, and it was as though he hissed lightning."⁹⁸ Though no wizard, Caisel, the King of Lochlann, has a magic shield which emits flames.⁹⁹ The power to change shape and create deadly illusions, which power is suggested if not actually exemplified by events in Gandalf's career such as his resembling an ancient beggar and his suddenly extinguishing the lights in the Great Goblin's hall, is actually possessed by Irish wizards. Curoi disguises himself as a great churl,¹⁰⁰ and Fear Coirche, a fairy wizard, turns the beautiful Sadbh into a fawn with the touch of his "hazel rod."¹⁰¹ A magic wand figures in the wizardry of Math, Son of Mathonwy, for with one he turns Gwydion and Gilfethwy into deer, wild pigs, and wolves on three successive years.¹⁰² Cathbad destroys the sons of Usnach by surrounding them with the illusion of a dark sea,¹⁰³ three fell women of the Sidhe cover Teamhair with enchanted "mists and clouds of darkness,"¹⁰⁴ Conn covers the plain of Magh Ai

⁹⁷ Cuchulain, pp. 78-81.

⁹⁸ New York, 1962, p. 67.

⁹⁹ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰ Cuchulain, p. 81.

¹⁰¹ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 176.

¹⁰² Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, trans., The Mabinogion (London, 1961), pp. 61-62.

¹⁰³ Cuchulain, p. 133.

¹⁰⁴ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 5.

with snow,¹⁰⁵ and the great magician Mathgen swears that, to help Lugh in battle, "I can throw down all the mountains of Ireland on the ground."¹⁰⁶ The Celtic wizards, though they do not resemble Gandalf in appearance, may have suggested his use of a magic wand and his magical fire, whereas the Italian wizards, like Gandalf but also like Odin and Merlin in appearance, are the probable sources of Gandalf's skill in finding his way through underground passages.

TROLLS

Awakening like Percival, alone in a house which was crowded the night before,¹⁰⁷ Bilbo discovers that the adventure is real when Gandalf sends him off to the inn, and soon the hobbit, like Beowulf, is departing with fourteen companions to rid a great hall from fiendish possession.¹⁰⁸ Snorri tells on two occasions on which Tor is not in Asgard because he has to "go away into the eastern region to fight trolls."¹⁰⁹ In the Lokasenna, as Loki is taunting the other gods, Thor is not at the assembly because he is "on a journey in the East,"¹¹⁰ and when he finally arrives, Loki teases him concerning his encounter with the giant Skrymir "on the East-road."¹¹¹ At Ragnarok the giants sail into battle from the east in their terrible ship,¹¹² and so it is

¹⁰⁵ Cuchulain, p. 148.

¹⁰⁶ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis, eds., Medieval Romances (New York, 1957), p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Beowulf, ll. 207-209.

¹⁰⁹ Prose Edda, pp. 54, 143.

¹¹⁰ Poetic Edda, p. 151.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 170.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 21.

fitting that, on their eastward journey, the dwarfs should encounter giant trolls. As they approach the edge of the wild, Bilbo and the dwarfs are drawn by need to the fire of three trolls in a clump of trees, and this is not the only time in The Hobbit when the pursuit of distant fires leads to trouble, though the trouble is with elves rather than trolls in the episode in Mirkwood. "The Trained Huntsman" in the Grimm Brothers' collection provides a particularly close analogue to Bilbo's approach to the trolls' fire: a young huntsman lost in a great forest sees a fire in the distance and discovers three giants roasting an ox on a spit. Having moved unnoticed through the darkness to the edge of the firelight, the boy shoots morsels from the giants' hands with an unerring blowgun, gains their confidence and then kills them,¹¹³ just the sort of trick Bilbo would like to manage. Giants around a fire figure also in an adventure in Saxo's History,¹¹⁴ and the troll episode illustrates a piece of advice which Brynhild gives Sigurd in The Saga of the Volsungs: "If thou goest by a way where evil creatures dwell, be thou wary, take no shelter near the road, though the night should come, for wicked folk often live in the places where men go astray."¹¹⁵

Perilous episodes result very often in Celtic tales from a wanderer's having sought shelter at night in a strange place and approached a fire. When Finn, out hunting in a strange country, is caught in a snowstorm with six of his men, he sends Caoilte ahead to look for shel-

¹¹³Jacog and Wilhelm Grimm, German Folk Tales, Trans. Francis P. Magoun, Jr. and Alexander H. Krappe (Carbondale, Illinois, 1960), pp. 405-407.

¹¹⁴Saxo, p. 353.

¹¹⁵Volsungs, p. 108.

ter for the night. The "house of light" which he finds is inhabited by fair people,¹¹⁶ but the encounter leads to such a battle with the elvish armies of Bodb Dearg that "from that time out the Fianna of Ireland had no more dealings with people living in houses than they had with the People of the Gods of Dana."¹¹⁷ But, however sound this resolution, Finn does not adhere to it. He and Doirraing are out hunting when night falls, and Doirraing discovers in a nearby wood a "fine well-lighted house of the Sidhe."¹¹⁸ Again the people are fair, but again battle with elvish folk ensues.¹¹⁹ More troll-like are the folk Finn encounters when he, Oisín, and Caoilte go horseback riding after dark. Again Caoilte looks for a place to rest and sees "a fire shining out of the valley below." The leader of the fierce household is a "big grey man," and the three-headed lady of the house¹²⁰ suggests Tolkien's statement that trolls behave badly, "even those with only one head each."¹²¹ During his visit with this ill-behaved household, Finn refuses to eat raw horsemeat, starting a fight which lasts through the night, and the hideous householders resemble Tolkien's trolls in that, though they are not turned to stone, they disappear as the sun rises.¹²² Cúchulainn is journeying "in the darkness of the night" when he sees three fires in wood before him. Around each fire are nine outlaws

¹¹⁶Gods and Fighting Men, pp. 253-254.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 263.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 253-254.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 268.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 300.

¹²¹Hobbit, p. 46.

¹²²Gods and Fighting Men, p. 301.

"that were robbing the country," and he kills three from each fire.¹²³

The absence of a house and the presence of robbers strengthens the parallelism between this and Bilbo's encounter, but Cuchulain is a legendary hero against whom ordinary outlaws are helpless, so the relationship between him and the outlaws is very different from the one between a hobbit and three trolls. Nevertheless, the occurrence in both episodes of the number three or multiples thereof is interesting. Perhaps the most interesting point about the other Irish analogues is that, in each of them as in The Hobbit, someone other than the leader of the group is sent ahead to investigate the strange light. In the story of the birth of Cuchulain, Fergus, who is not the King of Ulster, is sent ahead to find "some place where we can spend the night" after the men of Ulster have pursued a flight of enchanted birds until dark.¹²⁴

Much like these Irish stories is the beginning of the Middle English romance of Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle, in which Gawain and his companions are forced to visit the castle of the troll-like Carl when "a myst gan ryse in a mor" after they have been out hunting into the afternoon.¹²⁵

Tolkien's trolls may be identified, of course, with trolls in Norse eddic and saga literature. The term troll sometimes designates evil beings in general, but its strict denotation seems to coincide with jotunn 'giant'.¹²⁶ The giants in eddic literature, like Odin's

¹²³ Cuchulain, p. 297.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁵ Donald B. Sands, ed., Middle English Verse Romances (New York, 1966), p. 355.

¹²⁶ Georgia Dunham Kelchner, Dreams in Old Norse Literature and Their Affinities in Folklore (Cambridge, 1935), p. 41.

grandfather, may be seen as "the devouring demons of death,"¹²⁷ and their cannibalistic habits are the source of their name if Georgia Dunham Kelchner is correct in glossing jotunn as 'devourer'.¹²⁸ Dwellers in the East and traditional enemies of the gods, giants and trolls commit many terrible deeds in Old Norse literature. One story, of particular interest because it includes a cannibalistic troll who, like Tolkien's, eats mutton and has a treasure trove, is cited by Kelchner: a troll woman, who has been accustomed to stealing the shepherd of a certain farmer for her Christmas dinner, makes friends with one brave lad she has carried off and sends him home again, telling him that when he dreams of her it will be a sign that she is dead and that he may take the treasure in her cave for his own.¹²⁹ Grendel, who is called eoten 'giant',¹³⁰ is like Tolkien's trolls in that he is a cave-dwelling, treasure-hoarding cannibal who moves only at night, and his invulnerability to swords is probably shared by his Middle-earth kindred. Tolkien's verses on "The Stone Troll" explain:

But harder than stone is the flesh and bone
Of a troll that sits in the hills alone.¹³¹

Grendel and his mother seem not to be the only trolls in Beowulf's experience, for he brags that he has yðde eotena cyn 'destroyed a brood of giants'.¹³² Grettir the Strong's encounter with a troll-woman

¹²⁷ Turville-Petre, p. 49.

¹²⁸ Kelchner, p. 42.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

¹³⁰ Beowulf, l. 761.

¹³¹ The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, p. 40; reprinted in The Tolkien Reader, New York, 1966.

¹³² Beowulf, l. 421.

resembles the first part of Beowulf in many ways.¹³³ After a first encounter in a haunted house, Grettir is carried by the giantess across the countryside before he finally cuts off her arm beside her cavern home. Resemblances to Beowulf include the presence of treasure in the cave and the cave's location in a wilderness, but particularly interesting in relation to The Hobbit is a reference, absent from Beowulf, to the belief that sunlight turns trolls to stone: "The people of Bardardal say that the day dawned upon her [the troll-woman] while they were wrestling; that when he cut off her arm she broke, and that she is still standing there on the mountain in the likeness of a woman."¹³⁴ If the people of Bardardal are right, Grettir is saved, like Tolkien's dwarfs, by the dawning of day.

Cannibalistic giants are quite common in fairy tales, particularly those in George Dasent's Popular Tales from the Norse, and grotesque but seldom cannibalistic giants are also found in Irish and Arthurian stories and in the sophisticated fantasy of Ariosto. In James Stephens' retelling of "The Carl of the Drab Coat," the Fianna are saved by a creature whom Finn encounters in a Mirkwood-like forest, "a wild, monstrous, yellow-skinned, big-boned giant, dressed in nothing but an ill-made, mud-plastered, drab-colored coat."¹³⁵ The giant is one of the people of the Sidhe in disguise,¹³⁶ and his disguise resembles that assumed by Curoi in an Irish analogue to the Middle English Sir Gawain

¹³³ See Klaeber's discussion, pp. xiv-xvi of his Beowulf.

¹³⁴ George Ainslie Hight, trans., The Sagas of Grettir the Strong (London, 1928), p. 174.

¹³⁵ Stephens, p. 133.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

and the Green Knight.¹³⁷ Another Irish giant--"very black and ugly he was, having crooked teeth, and one eye only in the middle of his forehead"--guards the beautiful druid tree which bears berries of eternal life.¹³⁸ The Green Knight has lost all of his troll-like qualities except size, but Gawain still fights "wodwos ōat woned in ðe knarrez" ("forest trolls that lived in the rocks") on his way to the Green Chapel.¹³⁹ There are a few giant oafs in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. In Erec et Enide, Erec slays two giants who live in a forest, are armed with clubs, and have tied a knight whom they have captured naked across his horse,¹⁴⁰ but whether the knight is peeled for easier eating we are not told. Yvain, in the romance of that name, receives directions from "rustic lout, as black as a mulberry," whose head is "bigger than that of a horse or any other beast."¹⁴¹ In Le Morte D'Arthur Sir Lancelot kills two knights armed with clubs at the castle Tintagil,¹⁴² and an illusory giant seems to kidnap Bradamant before Rogero's eyes in Orlando Furioso.¹⁴³

As each dwarf in The Hobbit approaches the trolls' fire, "pop! went a nasty smelly sack over his head, and he was down."¹⁴⁴ The bag-

¹³⁷ Cuchulain, pp. 78-81.

¹³⁸ Gods and Fighting Men, pp. 368-369.

¹³⁹ Fernand Mossé, ed., A Handback of Middle English, trans. James A. Walker (Baltimore, 1952), p. 239.

¹⁴⁰ Chrétien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances, trans. W.W. Comfort (London, 1968), p. 157.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁴² Malory, I, 167.

¹⁴³ Ariosto, p. 122.

¹⁴⁴ Hobbit, p. 49.

ging of the dwarfs calls for attention because it is a motif repeated in Mirkwood, this time with bags of spider silk. Tolkien's heroes have a remarkable tendency to become trapped in closed containers throughout The Hobbit and in the beginning of The Lord of the Rings: they are enclosed in barrels, caves, trees, barrows, and bags, and Bilbo is, after all, Baggins of Bag-end. There are medieval analogues to the bagging of the dwarfs. When Beowulf grapples with Grendel, the monster's "glove" is said to hang "ample and strange, attached by curious clasps."¹⁴⁵ Though the glove may only be a "characteristic property of trolls," perhaps inherited from the story of Thor's meeting with Skrymir, Klaeber inquires whether glōf may "appear here in the unique sense of 'bag'."¹⁴⁶ Whether Grendel is meant here to carry a bag or not, the fact that his doing so has been postulated by Klaeber is sufficient to establish Beowulf as one of the works in which Tolkien encountered the idea of a troll carrying a bag. In the literature surveyed there are a few instances of men trapped and mistreated in bags. Ordered to drown young Havelock, the fisherman, Grim, carries the boy home in a foul, black bag ("In a poke, ful and blak"),¹⁴⁷ and the trolls' plans to dispose of the dwarfs by such means as sitting on them or mincing them compare with Grim's wife's mistreatment of the poor, trapped prince:

Whan Dame Leve herde that,
Up she stirte and nought ne sat
And caste the knave so harde adoune
That he crakede ther his croune ¹⁴⁸
Again a gret ston, there it lay.

¹⁴⁵ Beowulf, ll. 2085-2086.

¹⁴⁶ Klaeber, Beowulf, p. 205.

¹⁴⁷ Sands, p. 72.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

It is the light of Havelok's "king-mark," not of the dawn, which saves him as he lies that night by the fisherman's fire.¹⁴⁹ Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, disguised in troll-like garments, tricks Gwawl into placing his feet in a bag, "and Pwyll turned the bag so Gwawl was over his head in the bag, and quickly he closed the bag, and slipped a knot into the thongs." Though not immediately killed, Gwawl is terribly beaten in the bag.¹⁵⁰ In the tale of Branwen, the Irish plan to secretly break a truce with the host of the Island of the Mighty by hanging a bag from each of the hundred pillars of their hall, "and an armed man in every one of them."¹⁵¹ The captain of their enemies discovers the ruse, however, and, having been told that the bags contain flour, crushes the skull of each hidden warrior with his mighty hands.¹⁵² Also suggesting the dwarfs' confinement is the binding of Finn and Conan by three ugly old hags who sit at the opening of their cave and reel out "three strong enchanted hanks of yarn."¹⁵³ When the heroes pass through the yarn, they are seized by weakness and bound by the hags, as are the rest of the company, two at a time, until "in the end the whole number of them, gentle and simple," were put in bonds by the hags, and brought into the cave.¹⁵⁴ They are about to be killed when Goll, the last member of their company, arrives to defeat the witches and save them.¹⁵⁵ The points of

¹⁴⁹ Sanda, p. 73-74.

¹⁵⁰ Mabinogion, p. 15.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁵³ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 251.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

resemblance between this episode and that of the dwarfs' binding are several: members of a wandering company are bound, a few at a time, by three evil beings living in a cave, and the arrival of the last member saves them.

Gandalf, arriving to discover the dwarfs in bags, cunningly imitates the trolls' voices and keeps them arguing about slaughter and cooking methods until they are turned to stone by the sunrise. The discussion of ways of killing prisoners parallels a discussion in Chrétien's Cligés: "Some hold that they should be flayed alive, others that they should be hanged or burned. And the King for his part, maintains that traitors ought to be torn asunder."¹⁵⁶ Ordinarily dwarfs as well as trolls must be underground by sunrise. The sun is called "The Deceiver of Dvalin" for this reason,¹⁵⁷ and Thor practices a device very like Gandalf's on the dwarf Alvis, who has come to ask his daughter's hand in marriage. The Alvíssmál concludes with Thor's speech:

But with treacherous wiles must I now betray thee:
The sun has caught thee dwarf!
Now the sun shines here in the hall.¹⁵⁸

In the Helgakvithat Hiorvarthssonar, Atli and Helgi defeat a "corpse-hungry giantess"¹⁵⁹ by keeping her in conversation until the sun comes up. The results resemble those in The Hobbit:

It is day, Hrimgerth, for Atli held thee
Till now thy life thou must lose;
As a harbor mark men shall mock at thee,
Where in stone thou shalt ever stand.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Chrétien, p. 110.

¹⁵⁷ Poetic Edda, p. 188.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁶⁰ Hobbit, p. 51.

These formulas compare with Gandalf's words, "Dawn take you all, and be stone to you."¹⁶¹ The turning to stone of Grettir's abductress has already been mentioned.¹⁶² Irish and Arthurian analogues are less clear. One night Cuchulain faces three monsters in the shape of cats. Though his sword slips off one "as if from a stone," the monster becomes quiet and vanishes at the break of day.¹⁶³ Morgan le Fay Shapes herself "by enchantment into a great marble stone" to avoid pursuit by Arthur after she has stolen his scabbard of invulnerability.¹⁶⁴ Tolkien states that the petrified trolls "stand to this day, all alone, unless the birds perch on them,"¹⁶⁵ and Strider points out, when Frodo passes that way years later, that he knows the trolls are dead in part because of an old bird's nest behind one of their ears (I, 276). This may be an echo of the death of Cuchulain, for the hero ties himself to a pillarstone so that his enemies will not know when he is dead, but his trick is given away when a bird settles on his dead shoulder.¹⁶⁶ Strider's remark that a bird's nest "would be a most unusual ornament for a live troll" (I, 276) suggests Ercc's understated tribute to Cuchulain: "It is not on that pillar birds were used to settle."¹⁶⁷ Though perhaps the other analogues suggested some details, the two occasions in The Poetic Edda in which beings are kept talking until they turn to stone

¹⁶¹ Hobbit, p. 51.

¹⁶² Grettir, p. 174.

¹⁶³ Cuchulain, p. 69.

¹⁶⁴ Malory, I. 109.

¹⁶⁵ Hobbit, pp. 51-52.

¹⁶⁶ Cuchulain, p. 340.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 340.

are clearly the main sources for that aspect of Tolkien's troll episode.

Tolkien's evil creatures are dwellers in darkness and hate the sunlight, whether it turns them to stone or not. Glam, the troll-like ghost of a shepherd whom Grettir fights at Thorhallsstad, chooses the night in which to do his haunting,¹⁶⁸ as do Grendel and Beowulf's dragon. In the Grimm Brothers' story, "The Grave Mound," the Devil himself, after having been cleverly kept from seizing a sinner's soul by two men watching the grave, is about to lose his temper when "the first ray of the rising sun pierced the sky, and the Evil Spirit fled, shrieking loudly."¹⁶⁹ In a riddle by the ancient English scholar, Aldhelm, the night says of herself:

Grim robbers ever love me, who defend
And in my dusky bosom hide them close.¹⁷⁰

In an Old English riddle the night declares, "I lead astray the stupid, and urge the foolish on to rash journeys."¹⁷¹ A very severe distrust of anyone awake at midnight is expressed by Earl Ubbe when he first sees the halo which surrounds the sleeping heir to Denmark in Havelok the Dane. Ubbe suspects that Havelok is carousing or partaking in some sort of folly, in which case he should be cast in a ditch, for

Nou ne sitten none but wicke men,
Glotuns, reveres, or wicke theves,¹⁷²
By Christ, that alle folk in leves!

¹⁶⁸Grettir, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶⁹Grimm, p. 733.

¹⁷⁰Aldhelm, The Riddles of Aldhelm, trans. James Hall Pitman (New Haven, 1925), p. 59.

¹⁷¹R.K. Gordon, trans., Anglo Saxon Poetry (London, 1964), p. 293.

¹⁷²Sands, p. 107.

Middle-earth operates according to Ubbe's judgements, the good preferring the day, the bad the night. Goblins "don't like the sun; it makes their legs wobble and their heads giddy."¹⁷³ Therefore, it is night when they meet with the Wargs in a clearing to make a raid on men. Smaug is seen flying only at night in The Hobbit, and the dragon is sleeping when Bilbo ventures into the Mountain about sunset.¹⁷⁴ Beorn and the Elves are abroad at night, but then they are dangerous:. Beorn warns the dwarfs on their peril not to stray outside his hall until the sun is up,¹⁷⁵ and the Company is almost eaten by spiders as a result of its approaching elves after dark in Mirkwood. The antipathy between trolls and sunlight, therefore, is not only a direct borrowing from Norse troll lore, but also reflects the antipathy between evil beings and the daylight which is expressed both in Tolkien's fiction and in medieval literature.

ELVISH BLADES

After the trolls' petrification, Gandalf and the Company discover in their cave food, treasure, the clothing of previous victims, and two swords, which "caught their eyes because of their beautiful scabbards and jewelled hilts." Bilbo finds a beautiful dagger to use as a miniature sword.¹⁷⁶ Early in The Lord of the Rings Frodo acquires a marvelous sword from the underground lair of a barrow-wight, and, like Bilbo, he acquires it only after he has been rescued by the arrival of a benevolent power--in Frodo's case, Tom Bombadil--and both

¹⁷³ Hobbit, p. 95.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

hobbits use their swords to save their lives later in their respective stories. Beowulf discovers precious objects in Grendel's cave, but he takes back with him only the monster's head and the hilt of a marvelous old sword, the only one which will bite the monsters.¹⁷⁷ Grettir the Strong finds treasure and the remains of victims in his troll cave, and there is said to be a sword hanging on the wall, but he carries back only the remains to be buried. Earlier in his career Grettir does acquire a sword in an underground struggle with the undead corpse of Thorfinn's father, a fine, old short sword which he is promised as a reward after he brings the buried gold and silver back to Thorfinn.¹⁷⁸ Hervor, the mother of Heidrek the Wise, acquires Tyrfing from the awakened corpse of her father at his burial mound.¹⁷⁹ A barrow-dweller gives Thorkel Geirason a sword in the Sturlunga Saga,¹⁸⁰ and Merlin receives Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake, who lives within a rock in the water.¹⁸¹ These acquisitions of weapons from supernatural beings or spirits of the dead may parallel Sigmund's acquisition of Gram,¹⁸² for Odin, is, in his dark aspect, a blood-thirsty god of the dead.¹⁸³ Another way of viewing Bilbo's and Frodo's acquisitions of arms is that they receive swords from the equipment of the first foe they have a part in killing, in this way echoing the arming of Perci-

¹⁷⁷ Beowulf, ll. 1612-1615.

¹⁷⁸ Grettir, pp. 43-45.

¹⁷⁹ Heidrek, pp. 13-18.

¹⁸⁰ Kelchner, p. 67.

¹⁸¹ Malory, I. 42.

¹⁸² Volsungs, p. 49.

¹⁸³ Turville-Petre, p. 65.

val.¹⁸⁴

There are many marvelous swords in medieval heroic literature, and they do many things, including talking,¹⁸⁵ selecting a king,¹⁸⁶ and killing a man every time they are drawn,¹⁸⁷ but attention here will be limited to three qualities of the blades from the trolls' lair: (1) their ability to emit light, (2) their ability to cut anything, and (3) their having runes carved in them. The elvish swords claimed by Gandalf and Thorin, like the knife of Bilbo, glow when goblins are near, and Gandalf's is "a blue flame of delight in the killing of the great lord of the cave" in The Hobbit (p. 73). In The Prose Edda, when Aegir visits Asgard, Odin has brought into the hall swords so bright that "other illumination was not used while they sat drinking."¹⁸⁸ It is said of the great sword, Tyrting, that "every time it was drawn a light shone from it like a ray of the sun."¹⁸⁹ Surt will ride to Ragnarok with a sword from which "radiance shines brighter than from the sun,"¹⁹⁰ and when Arthur draws Excalibur, it is "so bright in his enemies' eyes" that it gives a light like thirty torches.¹⁹¹ The gleaming of swords is often mentioned in Old English verse, though it is not always clear whether the light is primary or reflected. In the nighttime battle at Finnsburg, the gleaming of swords makes it seem that all the fortress

¹⁸⁵ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 60.

¹⁸⁶ Malory, I. 10.

¹⁸⁷ Heidrek, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ Prose Edda, p. 89.

¹⁸⁹ Heidrek, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Prose Edda, p. 79.

¹⁹¹ Malory, I. 17.

is on fire,¹⁹² but the light may be reflected from the burning gables.¹⁹³ The OE compounds beadolōma and hildelōma 'battle-light' are both used to mean 'sword'. Hildelōma refers once to the dragon's fiery breath in Beowulf,¹⁹⁴ and once it is the name of the "best of swords."¹⁹⁵ Beowulf's sword is a beadolōma when, not holding back his blows, he beats "a greedy war-song" on the ogress' head but finds that the blade will not bite.¹⁹⁶ Later a gleam (lēoma) shines forth as he kills her with an ancient giant-made sword.¹⁹⁷ When the deadly weapons which can kill the King of the World are uncovered before Finn, there rise from them flashes of fire and deadly bubbles.¹⁹⁸ Though there are many medieval instances of swords that give light, there are few weapons which warn of the presence of enemies, but Conchubar is said to have owned a shield called Ochain 'the Moaning One' which, though hanging on the wall, would moan whenever the High King was in danger.¹⁹⁹

The observation that Glamdring makes "no trouble whatever in cutting through the goblin chains"²⁰⁰ introduces the peculiar sharpness of elven blades. This sharpness is manifested several times in

¹⁹²"The Fight at Finnsburg," in Klaeber, Beowulf ll. 35-36. A translation, with line numbers corresponding to those in the Klaeber text, is found in Hall's Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, pp. 178-179.

¹⁹³"Finnsburg," l. 1.

¹⁹⁴Beowulf, l. 2583.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., l. 1143.

¹⁹⁶Beowulf, ll. 1520-1524.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. l. 1570.

¹⁹⁸Gods and Fighting Men, p. 237.

¹⁹⁹Cuchulain, pp. 43-44.

²⁰⁰Hobbit, p. 73.

The Lord of the Rings, for instance, when Frodo's "elven-blade" cuts Shelob's great cobwebs after Sam's ordinary sword has failed (II, 421). Sigurd accepts Gram only after it has cut through an anvil without damage to the blade,²⁰¹ a feat no less impressive than one performed earlier, when Sigmund and Sinfjotli cut their way out of a stone grave mound by means of the blade which Signy has secretly given them:

Sigmund sawed with his sword amain,
And Sinfjotli; the rock was in twain.²⁰²

A great barrow sword, "the ancient work of giants,"²⁰³ cleaves Grendel after ordinary blades have failed,²⁰⁴ and Heidrek's Tyrfing bites "into iron and stone as if into cloth."²⁰⁵ When Gunnlaug visits England, he angers a pirate who "can turn the edge of every weapon," but Gunnlaug wins the resulting fight by using a special sword which the King gives him.²⁰⁶ In the Nibelungenlied Siegfried's sword, Balmung, is said to have such sharp cutting edges that "it never failed when wielded against a helmet,"²⁰⁷ an observation which seems to make explicit the main reason why iron-cutting blades were prized. Cuchulain's sword, Cruaidin Cailidcheann 'the Hard, Hard Headed', is so sharp that, when it cuts a man in two, the one half does not miss the other for some

²⁰¹Volsungs, p. 90.

²⁰²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

²⁰³Beowulf, ll. 1679.

²⁰⁴Ibid., l. 1590.

²⁰⁵Heidrek, p. 68.

²⁰⁶M.H. Scargill and Margaret Schlauch, trans., Three Icelandic Sagas (New York, 1950), p. 307.

²⁰⁷The Nibelungenlied, trans. William Alfred, in Medieval Epics (New York, 1963), p. 307.

time after.²⁰⁸ Naoise and his brothers are killed at one stroke by a sword which leaves no track or trace after it, for they do not want to see one another killed,²⁰⁹ and the magical sword which can slay the King of the World has already been mentioned.²¹⁰ These sharp swords tend, like Tolkien's elven-blades to come from ancient or royal sources: Sigurd receives his sword indirectly from Odin, Beowulf from a troll barrow containing the work of giants, Heidrek from stone-dwelling dwarfs, and Gunnlaug from the King of England. Though there are sharp Irish swords, blades of special sharpness and ancient lineage are most frequent in Old Norse and English stories.

After he has looked at the swords from the slain trolls' lair, Elrond, who knows "runes of every kind," explains where they came from and what their names are: "They are old swords, very old swords of the High elves of the West, my kin. They were made in Gondolin for the Goblin wars." The Trolls, Elrond supposes, must have come upon forgotten treasures stolen by dragons or goblins in the destruction of the ancient elf city.²¹¹ With the substitution of elves for giants and Elrond for Hrothgar, this passage echoes the one in Beowulf in which the hero gives to Hrothgar the sword which beheaded Grendel: "Then was the golden hilt, the ancient work of giants, given into the hand of the old warrior . . . after the downfall of the demons, a work of cunning craftsmen Hrothgar discoursed; he scrutinized the

²⁰⁸ Cuchulain, p. 145.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

²¹⁰ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 237.

²¹¹ Hobbit, p. 61.

hilt, the ancient heirloom upon which was inscribed the rise of the primeval strife when the flood, the rushing deep, destroyed the brood of giants Also it was correctly marked in runic letters . . . for whom that sword . . . had first been made."²¹² The name inscribed is that of the sword's first owner rather than that of the sword itself, but the substitution is easy in view of the frequency with which sword names are mentioned in heroic fiction. H.R. Ellis Davidson discusses several surviving inscribed Anglo-Saxon sword hilts, and, though the names inscribed seem to be those of the swords' owners or makers, the inscription on the controversial Gilton sword-pommel may have originally included the sword's name.²¹³ In keeping with the magical power of runes, traditionally first learned when Odin hung nine days on the windy tree, swords' runes do more than name a blade or identify its maker or owner.²¹⁴ A valkyrie tells Helgi of a sword "that is best of all" lying in Sigarsholm, and that sword has several inscriptions on it. "In the point," for instance, "is fear, for its owner's foes."²¹⁵ Versions of a poem in which a valkyrie teaches Sigurd sword-runes are included both in the Sigdrifumal and in The Saga of the Volsungs:

Runes thou shalt know, and cut on thy sword
 If thou wouldst have victory;
 On its hilt and its edge let them be, and twice
 Call on Tyr to favor thee.²¹⁶

Perhaps the carving of runes on blades is the source of an Irish belief

²¹²Beowulf, ll. 1677-1699.

²¹³The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford, 1962), p. 82.

²¹⁴Poetic Edda, pp. 60-61.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 277.

²¹⁶Volsungs, p. 105; Poetic Edda, p. 391.

that ancient swords used to tell of their past exploits every time they were drawn.²¹⁷ But, despite this and other non-Germanic swords which have the elven-blades' three qualities--sharpness, brightness, and runic inscriptions--Tolkien's elven-blades seem largely imitated from swords in Old English and Old Norse fiction.

CONCLUSION

Many similarities have been found between Gandalf and Odin. Odin's character is a mixture of good and evil traits; hence it seems that Tolkien has segregated Odin, the venerable father of white magic and teacher of runes, from Odin, the necromancer and glutton of crows, allotting his less attractive traits to Sauron and his more attractive ones to Gandalf, but Gandalf seems also to embody traits of Heimdall, Frey, and even Thor. Comparison between Gandalf and Merlin yields many similarities, but perhaps fewer than might be expected; though Gandalf and Merlin are enough alike to embody the same traditions of wizardry, Merlin's corruptibility, service to low purposes, and skill at creating illusions resemble more the qualities of the fallen wizard, Saruman, than those of the suffering but uncorrupted Gandalf. Finally, though Gandalf's physical appearance and many of his powers resemble those of Italian and Irish wizards, he has appearance, powers, and holy purpose in common only with the Christian wizard who helps to free Rinaldo from Armida's island in Jerusalem Delivered.

Tolkien's trolls are found, like their Norse cousins, in the East, and the dwarfs' encounter with them suggests many strange encounters in Norse and Irish literature which begin with an approach to a fire in

²¹⁷ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 60.

the wilderness at night. The trolls are orthodox Norse giants, cannibalistic, hard-skinned, night-roaming creatures of death, as are the monsters in Beowulf, and they suggest many giant oafs who are not specifically trolls in Irish, Italian, and French heroic literature. The casting of prisoners in bags is found more than once in the literature surveyed, and the idea that sunlight turns trolls into stone is expressed several times in Norse literature, but dwarfs as well as trolls seem to have been affected in this way by sunlight. In Tolkien's fiction, as in much medieval literature, the night is thought of as a time for evil beings, the day for good ones. Marvelous swords are found in the lairs of fell creatures in Beowulf and in several of the sagas, and the swords from the troll-lair have three qualities shared by swords in Norse, English, Irish, and French Literature: they emit light, they are very sharp, and they are inscribed with runes. These three qualities are all found, however, in Beowulf, and they occur very often in Old Norse heroic literature. Examination of the first part of The Hobbit confirms that Beowulf and Old Norse edda and saga literature are the main medieval influences on Tolkien's early fiction, but there are enough parallels between the first part of The Hobbit and non-Germanic medieval literature--notably Arthurian narratives, Irish heroic tales, and Italian romantic epics--to suggest these as secondary influences.

Chapter Five

Rings, Riddles, Shrieks, and Skin-changers

Among the most important events in Part II of The Hobbit, the adventures in the Misty Mountains and the lands west of Mirkwood, are Bilbo's finding the One Ring and his survival of a deadly riddle contest with its demented former owner, Gollum. A rather thorough discussion of rings is called for, not only by the fact that the ring saves Bilbo's life several times in The Hobbit, but by its central importance in The Lord of the Rings, which is a vast account of efforts by the Good to destroy, and the Evil to capture, the very ring which Bilbo finds under the Misty Mountains. The discussion will involve not only precious rings, magical and otherwise, but also other talismans of invisibility and power. Also discussed will be riddle contests and other verbal combats which resemble the one between Bilbo and Gollum, and some efforts will be made to identify sources of specific riddles in The Hobbit. Another point of interest is the terrifying scream which Gollum utters when he discovers his loss of the ring, for it suggests the more powerful shrieks of the Black Riders in The Lord of the Rings.

A striking characteristic of Part II of The Hobbit is the importance in it of wild animals who have speech and other human qualities and who are ridden like horses. The Goblins ride wolves, and Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarfs ride eagles, and such steeds, however uncommon in real life, are fairly common in medieval heroic literature. The fact that Beorn is explicitly a combination of man and bear suggests that the Wargs and Eagles, who have both human and animal qualities, may be taken implicitly as men who have become beasts, a kind of trans-

formation which occurs fairly frequently in the literature surveyed.

Perhaps the most interesting new character in this part of the story is Beorn, who seems to be a literal embodiment of some of the legendary qualities of those wild warriors who were called "berserks" in the heathen North, and Beorn's hall may be compared closely with the great halls in Beowulf and in Old Norse fiction.

RINGS

Bilbo finds in the Goblin caves a precious ring which makes its wearer invisible, gives him power,¹ and according to revelations in The Lord of the Rings, is engraved with a magical incantation and gives its bearer an evil kind of eternal youth (I, 278-280). Though there seems to be no ring in medieval literature having all of these qualities, there are many precious rings, some of them magical, and many magical objects conferring invisibility, power, and immortality. Rings are mentioned frequently in Beowulf, and the phrase hringa, fengel,² which Hall translates "the lord of rings,"³ may even be the source of the name of Tolkien's trilogy. There are two main Old English words meaning 'ring', bēag (bēah) and hring. The former, in the words of John C. Pope, designates "any ornament of precious metal bent or looped together; as a plural, in formulas, virtually equivalent to money or wealth."⁴ Hring is often synonymous with bēag but sometimes designates the non-precious circlets, for instance, of chain mail.⁵ Bēag and

¹ Hobbit, pp. 78, 87.

² Beowulf, l. 2345.

³ Hall, Beowulf, p. 138.

⁴ Seven Old English Poems (New York, 1966), p. 150.

⁵ See, for example, Beowulf, ll. 1502, 2260.

bring both occur in Old English constructions in which treasure or coins would perhaps seem more appropriate to the modern reader: a ruler, as the one who pays a body of warriors, is referred to as a ring-giver,⁶ and his home is a ring-hall,⁷ his treasury, a ring-hoard.⁸ Beowulf is presumably called "the lord of rings" simply because he is a ruler and pays his retainers with precious rings, but the rings are not said to have power beyond that of any other pieces of precious metal. In view of the condemnation of greed or "dragon-sickness" which seems so strong in The Hobbit,⁹ there is an appropriateness in the magical and corrupting object's being a ring, the apparent shape of money in the Old English heroic age. It may be that rings were used as money in Middle-earth at some time in the Third Age, for the dragon's hoard is said to contain much treasure, including a mail coat "wrought of pure silver to the power and strength of triple steel,"¹⁰ but no coins are mentioned.

Rings as a form of wealth are mentioned in The Saga of the Volsungs, where Sigmund and Sinfjotli come upon two sleeping princes "with great gold rings"¹¹ and Sigurd's treasure is said to include "great rings."¹² The ring which leads to Sigurd's death is one of the two rings in Norse

⁶Seven Old English Poems, p. 5; Beowulf, l. 1102.

⁷Beowulf, l. 1177.

⁸Ibid., ll. 894, et passim.

⁹See the discussion in Chapter Two of this essay.

¹⁰Hobbit, p. 220.

¹¹Volsungs, p. 60.

¹²Ibid., p. 112.

mythology which have, according to Snorri, the power to multiply wealth.¹³ Odin's ring, Draupnir, which is sent back to him as a remembrance after it has been sacrificed on his son's bier, drops eight gold rings of equal weight from itself every ninth night.¹⁴ Sigurd's ring, one of those taken from the hoard of Fafnir, bears a deadly curse originating from the time Loki steals treasure from Andvari in order to pay compensation for Hreidmar's son, whom he has killed.¹⁵ Another ring-like treasure of the Aesir is Freya's necklace, the Brisinga-men, which is the cause of an adventure when Loki steals it, is pursued by Heimdall, and is apparently defeated by the white god, who takes possession of "the Stone."¹⁶ When Beowulf is rewarded for cleansing Heorot with a gift of two arm-ornaments, a mantle and rings, and the best neck-ring the author has ever seen, the precious gifts are compared to a necklace which has, at least, the same name as Freya's.¹⁷ Possibly the Brisinga-men suggested one of the treasures in Smaug's hoard, "the necklace of Girion, Lord of Dale, made of five hundred emeralds as green as grass, which he gave for the arming of his eldest son."¹⁸

Invisibility is within the power of many in medieval heroic literature. Though his ring is not magic, Siegfried does own a magic cloak acquired, like the magic rings of Sigurd and Odin, from a dwarf,¹⁹

¹³Prose Edda, pp. 151, 73.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 73-74.

¹⁵Volsungas, p. 87.

¹⁶Prose Edda, pp. 13-15.

¹⁷Beowulf, ll. 1194-1200.

¹⁸Hobbit, p. 220.

¹⁹Nibelungenlied, p. 231.

and the cloak enables him secretly to help Gunther win²⁰ and consummate marriage with²¹ the shield-maiden, Brunhild. The cloak also resembles Bilbo's ring in that it adds power to its wearer, but the power is of a merely physical sort, not the strange strength of will given by Tolkien's rings: when Siegfried wears the cloak he has "strength enough, the might of twelve men besides his own."²² Aoibhell, a woman of the Sidhe, puts a "druid covering" on her lover before he enters battle so that he, like Bilbo,²³ may be invisible in the midst of battle, and the covering must be something like a cloak, for he is said to "throw" it off when he rejects his unfair advantage.²⁴ Midhir, the chief of the Sidhe, is invisible to all but Etain on one occasion when he comes to woo her.²⁵ The druid mist which the Sidhe seem able to create at will to hide their friends and themselves²⁶ and to conceal magical transformations²⁷ is a sort of invisibility, though it often seems to be only the raising of an opaque curtain. When Merlin does "such a craft that Pellinore saw not Arthur,"²⁸ he is achieving the effect of invisibility, whether by raising a mist or by taking away Pellinore's eyesight, another

²⁰Nibelungenlied, p. 231.

²¹Ibid., pp. 280-282.

²²Ibid., p. 252.

²³Hobbit, p. 267.

²⁴Gods and Fighting Men, p. 87.

²⁵Ibid., p. 75.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 211, 261.

²⁷Ibid., p. 263.

²⁸Malory, I, 44.

technique practiced by the Sidhe.²⁹ Balin slays Garlon, "the marvellest knight that is now living, for he destroyeth many good knights, for he goeth invisible,"³⁰ but there is no indication by what method Garlon becomes invisible. It is clearly something like a druid mist which enables Ismen to transport Soliman invisibly through an army of foes:

The air about them round (a wond'rous thing!)
 Itself heaps in solid thickness drew,
 The chariot hiding and environing;
 The subtile mist no mortal eye could view,
 And yet no stone from engine cast or sling
 Could pierce the cloud, it was of proof so true;
 Yet seen it was to them within which ride,
 And heaven and earth without all clear beside.³¹

It may be noticed that in nearly all of these cases invisibility is used to avoid combat or to obtain an advantage in it, purposes for which Bilbo uses his ring on several occasions: in the Goblin tunnels,³² in Mirkwood,³³ and in the Battle of Five Armies, though his ring does not increase his strength or, as Tolkien points out, stop flying arrows.³⁴

There are two rings of invisibility in the literature surveyed, one in Chrétien de Troye's Yvain, another in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso. Both grant invisibility if worn in a certain way, but they do not have the One Ring's power to make invisible one who merely wears them on his finger. Yvain's ring, given to him when he is trapped in a hostile

²⁹Gods and Fighting Men, p. 213.

³⁰Malory, I, 63.

³¹Jerusalem Delivered, p. 207.

³²Hobbit, p. 94.

³³Ibid., p. 155.

³⁴Ibid., p. 267.

castle, has an effect "like that of the bark which covers the wood so that it cannot be seen; but it must be worn so that the stone is within the palm."³⁵ The hand covering the stone apparently causes a "bark" to cover the wearer. Ywain's position in the castle is much like Bilbo's in the palace of the Elven-king: both move freely but perilously in enemy halls, temporarily trapped by an automatic door. The ring in Orlando Furioso is acquired in circumstances resembling those in which Bilbo acquires his ring; Bradamant, who (unlike Bilbo) knows about the ring before she sees it, is told by a wise woman that she may rescue her Rogero only by means of a magic ring presently in the hands of a "lewd and false" man who has Gollum's grotesque appearance and small size:

His stature is two cubits and a span;
His head is long and grey and thin of hair;
His nose is short and flat, his color wan,
With beetle brow, eyes wat'ry not with tear.³⁶

Derived, like Bilbo's ring, from the East, this magic ring must be placed in the mouth to produce its magical effect, but it does cause invisibility and alter vision:

This ring can make a man to go unseen;
This ring can all enchantments quite defeat.³⁷

On several occasions in The Lord of the Rings, when Frodo is on Weather-top (I, 263) and on Amon Hen (I, 518) and when Sam is alone outside Shelob's Lair (II, 436), the alteration the ring causes in its wearer's

³⁵ Chrétien, p. 193.

³⁶ Ariosto, p. 83.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

sight is described,³⁸ and though this is not identical with the alteration caused by the ring in Ariosto, it may perhaps have been suggested by it. Identified as a ring of "reason,"³⁹ not of power, Ariosto's ring dissolves illusions so Bradamant can see that an evil wizard carries only illusory arms⁴⁰ and Rogero can see that Alcina, who seems to be a beautiful young woman, is actually an ancient hag skilled in magic.⁴¹ Gollum calls the ring his precious, and Bilbo's use of the word in The Lord of the Rings indicates that the ring is gaining a hold over him (I, 59), so it is interesting to see Ariosto's ring called "precious" in the Harington translation of Orlando Furioso.⁴² After Bradamant takes the ring from its Gollum-like possessor, she takes pity on him and spares his life, an act which strongly resembles Bilbo's merciful refusal to kill Gollum.⁴³ In view of the similarities cited above, it seems probable that when he wrote The Hobbit Tolkien was aware of the accounts of magic rings in Yvain and in Orlando Furioso and that these accounts influenced his own composition.⁴⁴

³⁸The acuteness of hearing which the ring causes may be distantly derived from the magic ring which gives understanding of bird speech in Chaucer's "Squire's Tale," ll. 146-152, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston, 1957), p. 129. Subsequent references to Chaucer will be to this edition.

³⁹Ariosto, ed. Graham Hough, p. 83.

⁴⁰Ariosto, ed. Rudolf Gottfried, pp. 89-90.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 167.

⁴²Ibid., p. 88.

⁴³Hobbit, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁴The connection between the ring of invisibility in Ariosto and that in Tolkien is strengthened by a series of similarities between Orlando and The Lord of the Rings. Ariosto's ring changes hands often and is used by Angelica in a scene which, though unlike it in many details, has a profile very like that of the scene in which Boromir

Magic objects which give their bearer power or invulnerability are not uncommon in medieval fiction. Arthur's scabbard, which Morgan le Fay steals from him, has such power that he will lose no blood no matter how severely he is wounded,⁴⁵ and the girdle that Sir Gawain conceals from his host is said to have such power that no man wearing it can be slain by any skill upon earth.⁴⁶ Before he goes forth to prove himself as a knight, the hero of the Middle English romance, King Horn,

attempts to seduce Frodo away from his mission. When Boromir's threat becomes physical, Bilbo slips on the ring and flees the deserted place, leaving the knight of Gondor startled and enraged: "The man grasped, stared for a moment amazed, and then ran wildly about, seeking here and there among the rocks and trees" (I, 517). Rogero, who has a flying steed, arrives just in time to save Angelica, who has been bound naked on a rock as food for a hideous sea monster. Before he repels the beast with his magic shield, he gives her the ring to protect her from the shield's enchantment. Then he bears her away to a deserted grove in Brittany where he intends a more literal kind of seduction than Boromir's, but he is, like Boromir, a good man who has been overpowered by an extraordinary lure, in his case the lure of Angelica's magnificent beauty. While he is removing his armor for the anticipated play, she uses the ring to slip invisibly away. Boromir's exclamation when Frodo vanishes--"Miserable trickster! . . . You will take the Ring to Sauron and sell us all. You have only wanted your chance to leave us on the lurch" (I, 517)--suggests Roger's complaint when Angelica vanishes, though of course Rogero is insanely attracted by her beauty, not by the ring:

O cruel and unthankful wench (he said)
Is this the love that I deserv'd to find?
Dost thou reward him thus that brought thee aid?
To thy preserver art thou so unkind?
Take ring and shield, and flying horse and me,
This only bar me not thy face to see.

And, like Boromir, Rogero rushes madly about looking for his vanished victim:

Still groping as the weather had been dark,
Embracing of the air his arms between.

Fleeing aimlessly, Frodo comes to the Seat of Seeing, Angelica to a shepherd's cottage. The episode in Orlando is found in the Graham Hough edition, pp. 114-121.

⁴⁵Malory, I, 44.

⁴⁶Loomis, Romances, p. 372.

receives from his betrothed a ring said to be as good as any under the sun. Like the One Ring, it is engraved with a powerful inscription--the name of Horn's betrothed--and she tells him that its gems have such power that, if he looks into them and thinks of her, he will never be afraid of blows or crazed in battle.⁴⁷ Besides a cloak of invisibility which gives him the power of thirteen men, Siegfried also owns a treasure the effects of which are vague, vast and dependent on the wielder's skill like those of the One Ring; it is a "wishing rod of gold," and he who knows its nature can be "master over every man in the whole world."⁴⁸ Margaret Schlauch mentions a magic ring in Icelandic romance which gives "dominion over trolls,"⁴⁹ and the "charmed rod" of Ubaldo, the Christian wizard in Jerusalem Delivered, is sufficient to repel serpents, lions, and a host of other wild beasts guarding Armida's palace.⁵⁰ This passage strongly resembles that in The Lord of the Rings in which Frodo and Sam repel the nauseous she-beast Shelob with a sort of charmed rod, the star-vial of Galadriel (II, 418-420). Among the magical rings and other talismans in medieval heroic fiction, there seems to be only one which gives the kind of power granted by the One Ring, and that is Siegfried's wishing-rod, but it is strange that there is no account of his ever having used the powerful talisman.

One power of the One Ring which is not revealed in The Hobbit is the bestowing of an unwholesome sort of immortality, which is why Gollum lives to be hundreds of years old and Bilbo breaks the known

⁴⁷Sands, p. 31.

⁴⁸Nibelungenlied, p. 322.

⁴⁹Romance in Iceland, p. 35.

⁵⁰Tasso, p. 313.

record for hobbit longevity (I, 83-84; III, 382). The immortality of the Norse gods is not a part of their nature, but it is said to result from their tasting the apples which Idunn, a goddess, guards in a chest of ash;⁵¹ when Idunn is abducted by a giant, the Aesir speedily become "hoary and old" and force Loki to regain the apples.⁵² Apples of such virtue that "neither age nor sorrow" can touch two lovers who have eaten them grow in an Irish paradise,⁵³ and the berries of a rowan tree from the Land of Promise prevent sickness, restore youth, and intoxicate anyone eating them.⁵⁴ These resemble the One Ring only in that they are devices resulting in eternal youth, but they are foods rather than talismans. The most famous talisman of immortality in medieval literature is probably the Holy Grail, and the Grail in Wolfram von Eschenbach's elaborate tale of Parzival resembles the One Ring in several ways. Writing on the Grail appears and fades under certain circumstances (I, 80) and the writing is the Grail's way of choosing those who serve it.⁵⁵ The One Ring apparently has a part in choosing those who wear it, for Gandalf sees Gollum's loss of the One Ring as an act of volition rather than an accident: "It could make no further use of him: he was too small mean; and as long as it stayed with him he would never leave his deep pool again. So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum" (I, 88). The Grail's power to suspend ageing in anyone

⁵¹ Prose Edda, p. 39.

⁵² Ibid., p. 91.

⁵³ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 132.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 367-368.

⁵⁵ Wolfram, trans. Mustard and Passage, p. 252.

who looks at it at least once a week parallels the Ring's power except that it imparts a more wholesome immortality than does Sauron's ring, an immortality without the moral corruption and "fading" of substance which are the One Ring's ill effects. Wolfram describes the effect of the Grail, which in his tale is a precious stone, on anyone who sees it every week: "His appearance will stay the same, be it maid or man, as on the day he saw the stone, the same as when the best years of his life began, and though he should see the stone for two hundred years, it will never change, save that his hair might perhaps turn grey."⁵⁶ Anfortas, the Grail King, is kept alive, despite his illness and extreme suffering, by the nearness of the talisman.⁵⁷ It is very probable that Wolfram's account of the Holy Grail influenced Tolkien's conception of the One Ring, in The Lord of the Rings if not in The Hobbit. Rings are mentioned often in Old English and Norse fiction, but Bilbo's simple ring of invisibility has its closest analogues in Chrétien's Yvain and Ariosto's Orlando Furioso.

RIDDLES

After Bilbo finds the magic ring, he walks blindly down black tunnels until he reaches the underground lake where Gollum lurks, waiting for prey. The little cannibal has just eaten and is put off by Bilbo's sword, so he proposes a contest in which riddles are to be asked alternately. Addressing himself in the plural, Gollum puts it this way: "It must have a competition with us, my precious! If precious asks, and it doesn't answer, then we eats it, my preciousss. If it asks us, and we doesn't answer, then we does what it wants, eh? We shows it

⁵⁶Wolfram, p. 56.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 411.

the way out, yes!"⁵⁸ There are many Old English riddles preserved in the Exeter Book, but there seems to be no Old English record of a riddle contest. There are word combats in both the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda, but in only one Old Norse story does there seem to be any mention of riddle contests, or indeed of riddles.⁵⁹ Significantly, this is The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, which Christopher Tolkien, the son of The Hobbit's author, has edited and translated into English. The contest has much in common with that between Bilbo and Gollum, for one of the parties is in danger of losing his life if he loses the contest, and the threatened party (or in Heidrek, his proxy) wins by asking a question, not a riddle, which his opponent has no way of answering. Gestumblindi, a powerful enemy of Heidrek, receives word from the king that they must be reconciled if he cares for his life, and he prays to Odin for help. A mysterious stranger who looks just like Gestumblindi soon knocks at the man's house, borrows his clothes, and asks him to conceal himself. The stranger then visits Heidrek and, introducing himself as Gestumblindi, begs for reconciliation by means of a riddle contest, but in this case the god does all of the asking and Heidrek all of the answering. After many riddles have been asked and answered, the stranger asks one the answer to which includes Odin, and then he concludes the contest with the traditional unanswerable question:

What said Odin
in the ear of Balder
before he was borne to the fire?

⁵⁸Hobbit, p. 81. The knight in Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale," Florent in Gower's analogous tale, and King Arthur in "The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell" all face death unless they can answer a perplexing question, but other similarities between these stories and The Hobbit seem slight. See Robinson, p. 703.

⁵⁹Heidrek, p. xix.

Because only Odin knows the answer to that question (just as only the wearer of a pair of pants knows for sure what he has in his pockets), Heidrek recognizes his guest and slashes at him with a sword, but Odin escapes, pronouncing a curse on Heidrek.⁶⁰ The most striking similarity between the two contests is that both end with questions which are not strictly riddles and which, by their very nature, can only be answered by the one asking them.

In The Prose Edda King Gylfi, an ancient ruler of Sweden, is so troubled by the cunning of the Aesir that he visits Asgard in the guise of an old man. In Valhall, Gylfi approaches the king named Harr 'High' and asks if there is any wise man there. The interrogation game which follows, Gylfi asking questions and Harr answering, has mapped the entire Norse mythological cycle before Harr admits that he knows no more to say and the illusionary Valhall vanishes.⁶¹ Harr's statement before the interrogation begins suggests that Gylfi is in danger if he runs out of questions: "Harr said, that he should not escape whole from thence unless he were wiser."⁶² When Odin himself goes in disguise to Vafthruthnir's hall to learn the giant's wisdom, he receives a similar threat:

Forth from my dwelling thou never shalt fare,
Unless wiser than I thou art.⁶³

To win his life, or at least his freedom, Odin undertakes a contest of questions and answers with the giant and finally proves himself the

⁶⁰ Heidrek, pp. 32-44.

⁶¹ Prose Edda, pp. 13-84.

⁶² Ibid., p. 15.

⁶³ Poetic Edda, p. 70.

wiser when he asks the question he alone can answer:

What spake Odin himself in the ears of his son
Ere in the bale-fire he burned?⁶⁴

Thor's interrogation of Alvis is also a matter of life and death though the dwarf does not know it. No unanswerable question is needed to end Thor's interrogation, for it is only a trick to keep his daughter's undesirable suitor above ground until the sunrise turns him to stone.⁶⁵ Though the eddas contain only contests of knowledge, not of the ability to solve and propound riddles, these contests have much in common with the one in The Hobbit. Like Bilbo, Gyfli, Odin, and Alvis are alone in the abode of a hostile power, and Gyfli and Odin are told clearly that they will not leave unless they win the contest. Because Odin's is a question contest, it is natural that he should win by asking an unanswerable question, but his question, the same one he asks in his disguise as Gestumblindi, resembles Bilbo's in that it can only be answered by the person asking it. And, just as Odin's question reveals his identity to Heidrek and angers the king considerably, Bilbo's question-- "What have I got in my pocket?"--reveals to Gollum, even if after a brief delay, the location of his precious ring and makes him very angry.⁶⁶ With Christopher Tolkien's translation indicating an interest in King Heidrek within the Tolkien family, it is very probable that The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, which Christopher Tolkien believes to contain the only references to riddles in Old Norse literature, is the main source of the riddle contest in The Hobbit. Bilbo's contest,

⁶⁴ Poetic Edda, p. 83.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 184-194.

⁶⁶ Hobbit, pp. 85-89.

however, is like those of Gyfli and Odin in that a visitor's ability to leave his host's residence is made contingent on his winning, and, among the Norse word combats examined, only the one between Odin and Vafthruthnir involves the contestants' taking turns asking questions in much the same way that Bilbo and Gollum do.

Several of the riddles in Bilbo's contest appear to have no analogues among the Old English riddles in the Exeter Book, the Latin riddles of the seventh-century English, Aldhelm, or the English riddles from oral tradition collected by Archer Taylor. Perhaps unexpectedly, Tolkien seems to owe little to the Old English riddles, which often describe manufactured products, whereas Tolkien's riddles all describe natural objects or conditions. There are, however, a number of similarities between Tolkien's riddles and those in Aldhelm's and Taylor's collections. The nine riddles in the contest between Bilbo and Gollum will be examined in the same order in which they appear in The Hobbit. Tolkien's first riddle, based on an analogy between trees and mountains, has no apparent source and may have been composed as an expansion of the phrase, "roots of the mountain," which occurs two pages earlier.⁶⁷ That the second riddle is from oral tradition is indicated by Tolkien's statement that "Gollum knew the answer as well as you do,"⁶⁸ and Taylor gives several versions almost identical to it in wording.⁶⁹ Tolkien's third riddle, the answer to which is wind, may be original with him, but it suggests many paradoxical riddles based on the wind's intangibi-

⁶⁷ Hobbit, p. 79.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

⁶⁹ The riddles are designated as 503a, c, d, and e in Archer Taylor's English Riddles from Oral Tradition (Berkeley, 1951), p. 179.

lity, particularly Aldhelm's riddle which contains the following lines:

None can espy me, none lay hands on me;
My rushing voice shrills swift through all the earth.⁷⁰

Bilbo is said to have made up the riddle describing "sun on the daisies,"⁷¹ so it may have no immediate source; in any case, none is apparent. Gollum is said to have heard something like the next riddle, the solution of which is dark, and there are riddles both in Aldhelm's collection and in the Exeter Book which describe night in similarly sinister terms.⁷² The paradoxical riddle describing an egg as "a box without hinges, key, or lid" which hides a golden treasure resembles a riddle existing in many versions in English oral tradition, but, as Tolkien says, Bilbo has not asked it in the usual words, for the common form of the riddle compares the egg shell to a house, not to a chest.⁷³ The next riddle, the solution of which is fish,⁷⁴ seems to echo parts of two of Aldhelm's riddles, the solutions of which are fish⁷⁵ and flying-fish.⁷⁶ Like Tolkien's fish, which is "all in mail," the flying-fish is "clothed in scales," and whereas Tolkien's fish is "alive without breath," breath also suggests an assertion of Aldhelm's fish, who

⁷⁰ Aldhelm, p. 5.

⁷¹ Hobbit, p. 82.

⁷² Aldhelm, p. 59; R.K. Gordon, p. 293.

⁷³ Taylor, p. 179.

⁷⁴ Hobbit, p. 83.

⁷⁵ Taylor, p. 179.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

says, "No breath / livens my body with recurrent gusts." The riddle about legs has many analogues in oral traditions,⁷⁷ and the final riddle, the solution of which is time, may be of Tolkien's own composition, but the dramatization of the power of elemental things is found often in the medieval riddles; Aldhelm's riddle describing water⁷⁸ and the Old English riddle describing storm⁷⁹ are examples of this. Medieval analogues to the riddles in this contest seem to be few. Most of the riddles are apparently original with Tolkien, adapted by him from oral tradition, or imitated from other non-medieval sources.

SHRIEKS

When Gollum discovers his ring to be missing, he gives out a screech which sends a shiver down Bilbo's back,⁸⁰ and Bilbo's escape with the ring elicits an even stronger cry, "a bloodcurdling shriek, filled with hatred and despair." Again the sound's effect is described: "The cry brought Bilbo's heart to his mouth."⁸¹ This is only a faint suggestion of the cries of other ring-bearers, the Black Riders in The Lord of the Rings, whose voices are used as weapons in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields and first heard by Frodo and his friends in the Shire: "A long-drawn wail came down the wind, like the cry of some evil and lonely creature. It rose and fell, and ended on a high piercing note. Even as they sat and stood, as if suddenly frozen, it was answered by another cry, fainter and further off, but no less chilling to the

⁷⁷Taylor, pp.

⁷⁸Aldhelm, p. 17.

⁷⁹R.K. Gordon, pp. 290-291.

⁸⁰Hobbit, p. 38.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 93.

to the blood" (I, 131). In Gondor the screeches of the Black Riders freeze men in the midst of battle, "piercing the heart with poisonous despair" (III, 99). Cries of this sort are scattered throughout the literature surveyed. When Grendel realizes that his defeat is near, he sings a "terrible song" (gryreleoð) which has a similar effect on its hearers: "A horrible fear came to the North-Danes, to everyone who heard the shrieking from the wall."⁸² The effect of the cry suggests Fafnir's Helm of Terror,⁸³ but more particularly the effect of a cow which King Eystein sends out before his army in The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok. She runs at the armies of Ragnar's sons, making such a great din that the warriors who can hear her fight among themselves,⁸⁴ for the "devil's power" is said to be so strong in her that her howl drives the king's enemies mad.⁸⁵ The Welsh tale of "Lludd and Llefelys" tells of a plague in Britain which took the form of a scream every May-eve, "and that would pierce folk's hearts, and strike them with such terror that men would lose their hue and their strength and women the fruit of their wombs."⁸⁶ In an Irish tale three ravens from the north give "three gloomy screeches" which take "the courage out of the whole gathering."⁸⁷ Christian knights going to cut the enchanted forest in Jerusalem Delivered are finally routed by a "fearful sound" which

⁸²Beowulf, ll. 783-785.

⁸³Volsungs, p. 97.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 217.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 211.

⁸⁶Mabinogion, p. 90.

⁸⁷Gods and Fighting Men, p. 277-278.

drives them mad with terror:

Their reason gone, by no device they wote
How to prease nigh or stay still where they were
Against that sudden dread their breasts which smote.⁸⁸

Whether uttered by trolls, sacred cows, ravens, or invisible demons, loud screeches and bellowings seem to have been generally credited with the power to drive men mad with fear, so it is difficult to fix a definite source for the shrieks of Tolkien's evil creatures, but it is interesting that the motif occurs in Beowulf, apparently the source of so many other elements in The Hobbit.

SKIN-CHANGERS

After their escape from the Goblin caves, the dwarfs are surrounded by Wargs, rescued by talking eagles, and finally sheltered by a great skin-changer named Beorn. The skin-changer becomes a bear on certain occasions, particularly it seems at night, and his name is said to mean both 'bear' and 'warrior',⁸⁹ a point which is interesting in view of the fact that the Wargs have a name which seems derived from an Old English word, wearg, which means both 'wolf' and 'outlaw'.⁹⁰ They speak an intelligible language,⁹¹ and Tolkien may intend to make a distinction between Wargs and ordinary wolves, for the Goblin soldiers in the Battle of Five Armies "ride upon wolves and Wargs are in their train!"⁹² If Beorn is a heroic man who can take on the "skin" of a bear, the Wargs may at least suggest felonious men who can take on the skins of wolves.

⁸⁸Tasso, p. 270.

⁸⁹Hall, Beowulf, p. xvii.

⁹⁰See Hall, Dictionary, p. 399.

⁹¹Hobbit, p. 105.

⁹²Ibid., p. 255.

This possibility is strengthened by the appearance in Norse sagas of skin-changers of both kinds. In eddic literature the gods sometimes take the appearance of birds, and people who have been transformed into birds are common in ancient Irish tales; so the proud, talking Eagles may be seen as half-human, half-avian beings if not actually as skin-changers. Men have a profound desire, according to Tolkien, "to converse with other living things," and this is said to be the reason for widespread tales of talking beasts.⁹³ Certainly the half-human wolves, eagles, and bears, grouped together in one part of The Hobbit, are imaginative constructs intended to satisfy that profound desire. The explicit reference to skin-changing which introduces Beorn casts some light on the Wargs and Eagles, for, whether they are the result of enchantment or not, they may well be imagined as wolfish and aquiline men clad in the pelts and feathers of beasts.

Goblins ride wolves as men ride horses.⁹⁴ This unsavory alliance is suitable not only because wolves are savage carnivores, but because they are among the beasts which traditionally devour the corpses after a battle. Gunnar warns of the battle that will result if Atli insists on receiving Gudrun's treasure with the following formula: "It may be that thou wilt give a noble feast here to the eagle and the wolf."⁹⁵ After the ancient English Battle of Brunanburh, the victors leave corpses behind to be enjoyed by "that grey beast, the wolf of the wood" ("ðæt græge dēor, wulf on wealda").⁹⁶ At the ship-burial of Balder,

⁹³ Tree and Leaf, p. 66.

⁹⁴ Hobbit, p. 265.

⁹⁵ Volsungs, p. 164.

⁹⁶ Pope, p. 8.

a giantess is called from Jötunheim to push off the great vessel, and she arrives "riding a wolf and having a viper for a bridle."⁹⁷ Coming in from the forest one Yule-eve, the time when evil spirits are most powerful, Hethin encounters a "troll-woman" who rides on a wolf and uses snakes in place of a bridle.⁹⁸ In a poem celebrating Olaf Trygvesson's plunderings, the idea that trolls ride wolves is used in a variation on the traditional reference to corpses as the food of wolves:

At length the Saxon corpses lay
Heaped up, the witch-wife's horses' prey.
The steeds that she-trolls ride by night
Lap up the blood that's spilt in fight.⁹⁹

Rogero fights a troll-like woman mounted on a huge wolf in Orlando

Furioso:

She mounted was, but not upon a steed;
Instead thereof she on a wolf doth sit,¹⁰⁰
A wolf whose match Apulia doth not breed.

The medieval sources suggest that Tolkien's Wargs should be thought of as large, not that the Goblins should be thought of as particularly small, for Norse trolls ride wolves, and trolls are not usually small.¹⁰¹ The wolf that the giantess rides to Balder's funeral, perhaps akin to the wolf that will devour the moon,¹⁰² is so strong that four berserks have difficulty holding it.¹⁰³ Tolkien's wolf-riders reflect his consciousness of a belief, expressed several times in Old Norse literature,

⁹⁷Prose Edda, p. 73.

⁹⁸Poetic Edda, p. 285.

⁹⁹Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, trans. Samuel Laing (London, 1964), p. 28.

¹⁰⁰Ariosto, p. 153.

¹⁰¹See, p. 81 above.

¹⁰²Prose Edda, p. 24.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 73.

that trolls and witches ride on the backs of wolves. He has merely transferred the practice to his Goblins, who are troll-like evil beings.

The Irish hero, Caoilte, kills three skin-changers in the Valley of the Shapes of the Wolves. Three she-wolves who have the habit of destroying all nearby sheep are known to be three sisters, "and it is easier for them to do their robbery as wolves than as women."¹⁰⁴ First Caoilte lures them out with music, but he cannot kill them until he suggests that they should listen to music as women rather than as wolves, "and they threw off the dark trailing coverings that were about them."¹⁰⁵

The Saga of the Volsungs, which is rich in other parallels to Tolkien's fiction, tells the story of two skin-changers from their point of view. While Sigmund and Sinfjotli are living as outlaws ("They fared far and wide in the woods that summer and slew men to gain booty for themselves."), they come upon two sleeping princes who have hanging over them two wolf-skins. The "evil fate" of the princes is that they cannot come out of the skins except every fifth day, and the skins transform their wearers into great wolves. Sigmund and Sinfjotli try on the skins, and for five days they lose not only human shape but the power of human speech: "The two howled like wolves but either understood the other's voice."¹⁰⁶ They go separate ways, killing eighteen men between them, but Sigmund wounds his son in a wolfish argument and, cursing the wolf-skins, waits peacefully until the five days are past and then burns the skins, "praying that they should never harm another

¹⁰⁴Gods and Fighting Men, p. 282.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁰⁶Volsungs, p. 60.

man."¹⁰⁷ Sigmund and his son are weargas in both senses, 'outlaws' and 'wolves', and like Tolkien's Wargs, they live in the woods and plan deadly mid-summer raids against groups of men in a language which is inhuman but intelligible. Tolkien's Wargs are unlike actual wolves in that they can talk and that they organize raids in cooperation with humanoid beings; these points, along with the ambiguity of the apparent Old English source of their name, go a long way toward suggesting that they are a large group of outlaws wrapped, like Sigmund and Sinfjotli, in the enchanted skins of wolves. Another wolfish skin-changer is suggested in The Saga of the Volsungs. King Siggeir binds the ten sons of Volsung in a stock, and a she-wolf emerges from the forest to eat nine sons on nine successive nights until Sigmund finally kills her, "and it is the saying of some men that that same wolf was the mother of King Siggeir, who put on this shape for the purpose of trolldom and sorcery."¹⁰⁸

Tolkien lists, among the "old ambitions and desires" which fairy-stories begin to satisfy, "the longing for the gracious economical flight of a bird,"¹⁰⁹ and this is certainly a desire which the narrow escape from flaming trees and the subsequent flight to the Carrock in The Hobbit begin to satisfy. The eagles do not notice Bilbo when they rescue the dwarfs, so he escapes the fire only by clinging to the legs of Dori,¹¹⁰ an image which suggests Loki's position once in the Prose Edda. Swinging a stick to strike a huge eagle who is taking his food, Loki finds

¹⁰⁷ Volsungs, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Tree and Leaf, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Hobbit, p. 111.

himself carried aloft when the stick adheres to the eagle and the bird takes flight.¹¹¹ Like Bilbo, who moans, "my arms, my arms,"¹¹² Loki thinks that his arms may be torn from his shoulders.¹¹³ The eagle, who is actually an evil giant, forces Loki to swear to deliver Idunn and her apples, so Loki brings her to a forest where the motif of an eagle carrying a person is repeated, this time as the transformed giant abducts Idunn.¹¹⁴ In a French romance about Alexander the Great, the youthful pupil of Aristotle flies in a chair strapped between two huge gryphons.¹¹⁵ In The House of Fame, Chaucer describes a dream in which he finds himself on a vast, featureless plain and, praying for help, sees a golden eagle overhead. The dreamer tells how the great bird descends:

And with hys grymme pawes stronge,
 Withyn hys sharpe nayles longe,
 Me, fleyng, in a swap he hente,
 And with hys sours ayen up wente,
 Me caryng in his clawes starke
 As lyghtly as I were a larke. (ll. 541-546)

Like Tolkien's eagles, the golden bird speaks "in mannes vois," and his first words to Geoffrey are, "Awak! And be not agast so, for shame."¹¹⁶ This condescending reassurance that there is no danger strongly suggests the eagle's first words to Bilbo when the hobbit is able to ride him normally: "Don't pinch! . . . You need not be frightened like a rabbit, even if you look rather like one."¹¹⁷ People ride birds several times

¹¹¹ Prose Edda, p. 90.

¹¹² Hobbit, p. 111.

¹¹³ Prose Edda, p. 90.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

¹¹⁵ Loomis, Romances, p. 240.

¹¹⁶ ll. 556-557.

¹¹⁷ Hobbit, p. 115.

in The Lord of the Rings; Gandalf is rescued from Orthanc by an eagle (I, 343), and the Black Riders ride appropriately unpleasant fowls (I, 501-502, et passim). Though no more bird than horse, the Hippogriff in Orlando Furioso resembles these fabulous steeds.¹¹⁸ Because of the similarity between Loki's clinging to a staff and Bilbo's clinging to Dori's feet and of the similarity between the golden eagle's speech to Geoffrey and the Eagle's speech to Bilbo, The Prose Edda and the House of Fame seem the most probable medieval sources for Tolkien's accounts of people carried by eagles.

Tolkien's talking eagles may well be connected with the skin-changers, common in medieval Norse and Irish fiction, who have taken on the feather cloaks of birds. The eagle who abducts Idunn is actually the giant Thjazi "in his eagle's plumage,"¹¹⁹ and Loki regains the apples by flying to Jotunheim in the "hawk's plumage" which he borrows from Freya.¹²⁰ In the Thrymskvitha Loki flies again to Jotunheim in Freya's "feather-dress," this time to look for Thor's missing hammer.¹²¹ Odin transforms himself into a hawk to escape King Heidrek's wrath at the end of their riddle contest,¹²² and the huge bird which opposes a Danish warlock's reconnaissance of Iceland probably represents the external soul of Eyolf Valgerdwon, an Icelandic chieftain.¹²³ In the

¹¹⁸ Ariosto, p. 90, et passim.

¹¹⁹ Prose Edda, p. 90.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

¹²¹ Poetic Edda, p. 175.

¹²² Heidrek, p. 44.

¹²³ Heimskringla, pp. 33-34.

Volundarkvitha three brothers come upon three women who have "swan-garments" beside them, "for they were Valkyries."¹²⁴ When Glodeudd and her lover contrive to kill her lord, he is pierced with a spear but, rather than dying an ordinary death, flies up "in the form of an eagle" and is seen no more¹²⁵ until Gwydion disenchanting him with a magic wand.¹²⁶ His wife is transformed into an owl for her treachery.¹²⁷ Cuchulain accidentally wounds a king's daughter who has flown to visit him in the shape of a bird.¹²⁸ The father of Conaire is a bird who, after leaving his "birdskin," appears to be an ordinary man,¹²⁹ and Conaire meets with Nemglan, a king of birds, when he follows great speckled birds down to the ocean: "They left their birdskins, and it was men he saw before him, and they turning to face him with spears and swords."¹³⁰ Even the wineherds of the Sidhe have knowledge of enchantment, and two swineherds of rival king are seen quarreling in the shapes of ravens before they change back into men.¹³¹ Brian and his brothers change themselves into swift hawks in order to steal three apples,¹³² and on one occasion Finn's uncle, Labran, flies over the

¹²⁴Poetic Edda, p. 254.

¹²⁵Mabinogion, p. 71.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 73.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 74.

¹²⁸Cuchulain, p. 41.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 84.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 86.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 269.

¹³²Gods and Fighting Men, p. 37.

sea "in the shape of a great eagle."¹³³

A particularly strong suggestion that the Eagles are to be regarded as skin-changers is their wearing golden ornaments. "The lord of the eagles," Tolkien writes, "became in after days the King of All Birds and wore a golden crown, and his fifteen chieftains golden collars . . ."¹³⁴ A golden ornament on the neck of a bird is an infallible sign in the Old Irish tales that the bird is actually a person under enchantment. The birds, linked with gold and silver chains, who lead to the place of Cuchulain's birth are actually Dechtire and her fifty maidens.¹³⁵ Angus finds his enchanted love among a flock of birds with "silver chains about their necks."¹³⁶ When Cuchulain and Laeg see two birds "linked together with a chain of red gold," Laeg warns that there is enchantment behind those birds."¹³⁷ When the hero strikes one with his spear, they turn into women.¹³⁸ Etain and Midhir escape Eochard by becoming two swans, "linked together by a chain of gold."¹³⁹ Though Tolkien's eagles are not necessarily able to change into men, they have qualities in common with skin-changers who become birds in Norse and Irish fiction: they are large, they can speak like men, and wear golden ornaments. The power to become avian is almost exclusively possessed by gods, fairies, and royalty in medieval literature and Tolkien's eagles

¹³³ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 235.

¹³⁴ Hobbit, p. 116.

¹³⁵ Cuchulain, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

¹³⁹ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 99.

are a "proud and strong and noble-hearted" race.¹⁴⁰

Beorn is said to be a "skin-changer," which is a literal translation of ON hamrammr,¹⁴¹ a word which also refers to the state of warlike fury characterizing Norse "berserks."¹⁴² A compound formed of words meaning 'bear' and 'shirt', 'pelt', the word refers to "a wild warrior of the heathen age,"¹⁴³ and, in the words of Christopher Tolkien, "Berserks were said to fight without corselets, raging like wolves with the strength of bears, and might be regarded almost as shape-changers, who acquired the strength and ferocity of beasts."¹⁴⁴ Clearly Beorn is a literal embodiment of the Norse berserk, changed only by the removal of the "almost" from Christopher Tolkien's description: he is a shape-changer with the strength and ferocity of beasts. Beorn appears in his huge "bear's shape" at the Battle of Five Armies and routs the Goblin host as, unarmored but undaunted by spears, he roars "like drums and guns" and tosses "wolves and goblins from his path like straws and feathers."¹⁴⁵ Beowulf, who is "strongest of mankind in might"¹⁴⁶ and who defeats Grendel in a contest of bear-like wrestling, has a name which would be quite appropriate for a berserk if one etymology termed "eminently plausible" by Klaeber is correct; Beowulf may derive from a form meaning 'bee-wolf', which may be taken in the sense of

¹⁴⁰ Hobbit, p. 108.

¹⁴¹ Schlauch, Romance, p. 13.

¹⁴² Zoega, p. 183.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 50, 356; Heidrek, p. 93.

¹⁴⁴ Heidrek, p. 93.

¹⁴⁵ Hobbit, p. 274.

¹⁴⁶ Beowulf, l. 196.

'bear' (the ravager of hives).¹⁴⁷ Significantly, Beorn is a bee-keeper and honey is a large part of his diet.¹⁴⁸ Berserks as fearful warriors who are almost invulnerable to weapons appear often in ON heroic literature. Thor brags of having defeated berserks in the Harbarthsljóth,¹⁴⁹ and Eunnlaug fights a berserk who is invulnerable to all weapons but a certain sword.¹⁵⁰ The berserks slain by Grettir at Haramarsey are only ruffians and pirates, but they are "bigger and stronger than ordinary men," and when they fall into a "berserk's fury" nothing can stand before them.¹⁵¹ The berserks in The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise howl while the berserk's frenzy, the equivalent of Beorn's "bear's shape," is in possession of them. A foe who sees them describes their approach:

Fear beset me
for a single moment
as they left the longships
loudly bellowing,
crying terribly
climbed the island,
twelve together,¹⁵²
inglorious men.

A berserk in The Saga of Gisli is named Bjorn,¹⁵³ and Margaret Schlauch refers to a saga in which a man must become a bear at night,¹⁵⁴ a point which may have suggested the growling and scuffling Bilbo hears at night

¹⁴⁷ Beowulf, p. xxv.

¹⁴⁸ Hobbit, p. 119.

¹⁴⁹ Poetic Edda, p. 133.

¹⁵⁰ Scargill, p. 23.

¹⁵¹ Grettir, p. 46.

¹⁵² Heidrek, p. 5.

¹⁵³ George Johnston, trans., The Saga of Gisli (Toronto, 1963), p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Schlauch, Romance, p. 131.

in Beorn's hall.¹⁵⁵

In the Heimskringla, Astrid and her guides are fleeing from a troop of armed men who are pursuing them when they come to a region called Skon. "Here they saw a large mansion, towards which they went and begged a night's lodging. For the sake of concealment they were clad in mean clothing. There dwelt here a bonder called Biorn Edderquise, who was very rich, but very inhospitable."¹⁵⁶ There are many parallels between the situation of the dwarf company after they have been set down on the Carrock. The dwarfs are east of the Misty Mountains, and Skon is the name, according to Jacqueline Simpson, of several districts "east of the mountains."¹⁵⁷ The dwarfs are being pursued by goblin troops when they come to a "wide hall" and beg for a night's lodging. The "mean clothing" of Astrid and her company may have suggested Bilbo's painful consciousness of his "many missing buttons."¹⁵⁸ The final connection, and the one which makes it almost certain that Tolkien's episode is partly imitated from Snorri's, is the similarity between the two names, for ON björn, like OE beorn, is a form of the word "bear."¹⁵⁹ Beorn's "wide hall" seems to suggest the great halls in ancient Northern literature, Heorot in Beowulf and Thorhall's house in The Saga of Grettir the Strong: except for the absence of weapons on the wall, Tolkien's drawing of the hall in the hardback edition of The Hobbit (p. 131) very

¹⁵⁵ Hobbit, p. 129.

¹⁵⁶ Heimskringla, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Hobbit, p. 121.

¹⁵⁹ See Tolkien, "Prefatory Remarks," in Hall, trans., Beowulf; p. xvii.

strongly resembles the illustration of "the interior of a Norse hall" in E.V. Gordon's Introduction to Old Norse (p. 28), a book which Tolkien helped to prepare for the press (p. ix). Both are long, barn-like wooden halls with a series of pillars on either side of a long central trough in which a fire burns, the smoke apparently climbing toward a smoke vent in the peak of the roof, and the halls have in them tables of identical construction. The pillars in the Norse hall are carved in the shapes of men and women, an inappropriate ornamentation for a half-animal solitary, so Beorn's pillars are formed in the shapes of trees with limbs spreading at the top. Though a vegetarian and a kindly host to his friends, Beorn "can be appalling when he is angry,"¹⁶⁰ and he clearly portrays a berserk warrior of the heathen Northland; Tolkien has done little more than make literal and credible the fantastic connotations of the word, hamrammr 'skin-changer', which was applied to Norse berserks.

CONCLUSIONS

Rings are often mentioned in Beowulf, and there are two important magic rings in Norse mythology as related in The Prose Edda, but the English and Norse ring seem to be important only as forms of wealth, and even the magic rings only reproduce themselves. There are a number of accounts of invisibility in the literature surveyed, in The Nibelungenlied, in Malory, and in Tasso, and invisibility is commonly induced by the people of the Sidhe in Irish tales, but there are only two instances of invisibility induced by a ring, one in Chrétien's Yvain and one in Orlando Furioso. Similarities between these stories and Tolkien's suggest that he may have imitated both Chrétien and

¹⁶⁰Hobbit, p. 118.

Ariosto. Among the several talismans of power and immortality in medieval heroic fiction, only Siegfried's "wishing-rod" and Wolfram's Grail resemble the One Ring enough to be probably connected with it.

The Main source for Tolkien's riddle contest seems to be the contest in The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, but there are also interesting parallels between his contests and the several question games in eddic literature. The riddles themselves seem to have few medieval analogues and are perhaps original with Tolkien or imitated from modern sources.

There are enough accounts of fear-inducing shrieks distributed throughout the literature surveyed to establish Gollum's shriek as a possible echo of a common medieval motif, but it seems impossible to isolate any one source.

Tolkien's Wargs, his Eagles, and Beorn seem to deserve consideration together because they are all combinations of human and animal qualities, and the riding of wolves and eagles, like the transformation of men into wolves and birds, occurs in several medieval stories. Wolf-riding is practiced by Norse trolls, and the description of Sigmund's transformation into a wolf suggests Tolkien's descriptions of Wargs. Similarities between Bilbo's eagle-riding and similar events in The Prose Edda and Chaucer's The House of Fame suggest that Tolkien may have imitated them, and the human qualities of birds suggest transformed folk in Irish as well as in Norse tales. Beorn is a literal embodiment of the legendary qualities of Norse berserks, for he becomes a bear literally rather than metaphorically, and his bear-shape compares to the fighting fury of the ancient warriors; furthermore, his hall may be only a reproduction, with changes suited to Beorn's charac-

ter, of the Norse hall illustrated in Gordon's Introduction to Old Norse. The largest number of important medieval parallels with Tolkien's fiction discussed in this chapter have been from Norse saga and eddic literature, and there have again been distinct echoes of Beowulf, but several strong parallels between Tolkien and works in other literatures have suggested that his roots probably extend into Irish, French, and Italian heroic literature as well.

Chapter Six

Woods, Water, Elves, and Delvings

Part III of The Hobbit, the adventures in Mirkwood, is a short section which seems to contain relatively few medieval echoes except those pertaining to the forest itself, to its enchanted stream, and to elves. Underground dwellings appear throughout The Hobbit, and the underground palace of the Elven-king will be taken as an occasion for discussing some medieval houses underground.

WOODS

Mirkwood or 'Dark Forest' is a translation of ON Myrkviör, the translation which is regularly used in both the Olive Bray and the Henry Adams Bellows translations of The Poetic Edda as well as in Christopher Tolkien's translation of The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise.¹ In the Lokasenna Mirkwood is a dark forest on the boundary of the fire-world,² and the Mirkwood in the Völundarkvitha is a forest through which three valkyries fly from "the south" to a fictional place called Ulfdalir.³ The forest which divides Atli's realm from that of the Gjukungs is called "Mirkwood the secret,"⁴ and to reach Atli's realm the heroes gallop across mountains and through Mirkwood.⁵ In The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, Mirkwood divides the land of the Huns from the land of the Goths,

¹ The spellings differ slightly in these translations: Bray renders it Murk-wood and Bellows Myrkwood, but Christopher Tolkien, like his father, uses Mirkwood.

² Poetic Edda, p. 165.

³ Ibid., p. 255.

⁴ Ibid., p. 483.

⁵ Ibid., p. 487.

and armies pass through it in the war between them.⁶ Tolkien's Mirkwood resembles these in that it is a dark and mysterious forest dividing two regions, though it divides east from west⁷ and the Norse Mirkwoods seem to divide north from south; the fire-realm is to the south,⁸ and the valkyries fly from the south.⁹ In each of these references to Mirkwood, travel through it is part of a warlike or adventurous journey, and no one is described as living in it, so the Norse Mirkwoods seem to be as desolate as Tolkien's. Interesting is the fact that the Niflungs, like the dwarfs, travel over mountains and then through Mirkwood in their journey to Atli's kingdom, and Atli is, at least from their point of view, as dangerous as Smaug the dragon. Clearly the Norse references to Mirkwood are among the models used by Tolkien when he created the dark forest between Esgaroth and the Misty Mountains.

A forest which seems particularly to resemble Mirkwood appears in James Stephens' retelling of an Irish tale, "The Carl of the Drab Coat." Coming upon a "intricate gloomy wood, where the trees grew so thickly and the undergrowth was such a sprout and tangle that one could scarcely pass through it," Finn looks for a path which "had once been hacked through the forest,"¹⁰ and the grotesque giant whom Finn encounters on it turns out later to be a disguised ruler of the Sidhe,¹¹ who are the

⁶Heidrek, pp. 52-53.

⁷Hobbit, p. 12-13.

⁸Poetic Edda, p. 22.

⁹Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁰Stephens, p. 133.

¹¹Ibid., p. 145.

chief medieval models for Tolkien's elves. The darkness in Mirkwood, which is so overgrown that daylight oozes through to the road only as "a sort of darkened green glimmer" and nights are pitch dark, "not what you call pitch dark, but . . . so black that you really could see nothing,"¹² parallels closely the darkness of the haunted wood which lies near the Christian camp in Jerusalem Delivered:

From Godfrey's camp a grove a little way,
 Amid the valleys deep, grows out of sight,
 Thick with old trees, whose horrid arms display
 An ugly shade, like everlasting night:
 There, when the sun spreads forth his clearest ray,
 Dim, thick, uncertain, gloomy seems the light;
 As when, in evening, day and darkness strive
 Which should his foe from our horizon drive.

But when the sun his chair in seas doth steep,
 Night, horror, darkness thick, the place invade,
 Which veil the mortal eyes with blindness deep,
 And with sad terror make weak hearts afraid.¹³

Bilbo and the dwarfs sleep huddled together, catching occasional glimpses of glowing eyes in the blinding darkness.¹⁴

¹² Hobbit, pp. 140-141.

¹³ Tasso, pp. 265-266.

¹⁴ Among the many marvelous monsters in medieval heroic literature, there seem to be no giant spiders, so the brood of Shelob, some of which reside in Mirkwood, is probably original with Tolkien or imitated from a more recent source. Somewhat analogous to the spiders' glowing eyes are those of Grendel as he advances angrily into Heorot: "From his eyes came out a horrible light, most like a flame" (ll. 726-727). When Satan convenes his monsters in Jerusalem Delivered, "his eyes . . . two beacons seem" (p. 63), and a dragon in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain (trans. Sebastian Evans, New York, 1958) illuminates "the whole country with the flashing of his eyes" (p. 211). The binding of the dwarfs is suggested by a portion of an OE charm "Against a Dwarf" ("Wið Dweorh") who is probably a personification of a convulsive disease. See Gordon, p. 86:

Here came a spider creature stalking in;
 He had his covering in his hand.
 He said that you were his steed.
 He puts his bonds on your neck.

WATER

The black stream which is not to be touched and which causes sleep when it is touched resembles the Classical river Styx, an analogue to the river which divides "the world of men from the world of monsters" in Thorkillius' quest for the realm of Geruthus.¹⁵ The dwarfs' loss of the boat after they have crossed suggests an episode in The Nibelungenlied, in which Hagen hacks to pieces the boat which has carried the Burgundians across the river bordering the lands of the Huns. Hagen does this intentionally so that ignominious retreat will be impossible,¹⁶ and the loss of the dwarfs is an accident, but the effect is the same in both cases. At the heart of the dark wood in Jerusalem Delivered there is an enchanted stream;¹⁷ and on Armida's island is a spring which has effects similar to the black stream's except that it lures its victims away from active life with empty mirth rather than with empty dreams:

But in those liquors cold the secret sting
Of strange and deadly poison closed lies;
One sup thereof, the drinker's heart doth bring
To sudden joy, whence laughter vain doth rise;
Nor that strange merriment nor stops nor stays,¹⁸
Till with his laughter's end he ends his days.

The text of the charm appears in George Philip Krapp and Arthur Garfield Kennedy, eds., An Anglo-Saxon Reader (New York, 1929), p. 140. Spiders is the solution to a riddle which emphasizes the multiple eyes and "great knobbed joints high above her back" which are so prominent in Tolkien's description of Shelob (II, 425). The riddle in The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise (p. 35) reads in part as follows:

Eight are its feet
and four its eyes
and knees above belly it bears.

¹⁵ Heidrek, p. 84.

¹⁶ Nibelungenlied, pp. 361-362.

¹⁷ Tasso, p. 361.

ELVES

That the black stream is the border of the realm of the elves is suggested when some "snowy white" deer appear and vanish suddenly on the eastern side of the stream,¹⁹ for white animals are usually the animals of elves or of the Sidhe. The dogs of the king of the Underworld, whom Pwyll meets in The Mabinogion, are white with red ears,²⁰ and a shining white boar leads the dogs of Pryderi into an enchanted fortress where they vanish.²¹ A strange white stag leads the hunt of King Mark to the Love Grotto where Tristan and Isolt are hiding.²² The mysterious Red Woman from the Sidhe's Country of the Young produces from her cloak "a little hound as white as the snow of the mountains."²³ So the sudden apparition of white animals may be taken as a sign, traditional in medieval Celtic literature, that the dwarfs have entered an enchanted realm.

Just before they see the deer glimmering in the shadows, the dwarfs hear the "dim" blowing of horns and the baying of dogs, but they see no signs of the great hunt passing to the north.²⁴ This passage strongly suggests one in the ME romance of Sir Orfeo, in which the despairing Orfeo, wandering in a forest, is sometimes said to hear

The king o fairy with his rout
Com to hunt him all about

¹⁹Hobbit, p. 145.

²⁰Mabinogion, p. 3.

²¹Ibid., p. 46.

²²Gottfried Von Strassburg, Tristan, trans. A.T. Hatto (Baltimore, 1960), p. 269.

²³Gods and Fighting Men, pp. 298-299.

²⁴Hobbit, p. 145.

With dim cry and bloweing,
and houndes also with him berking;

but he sees them take no beast, nor does he know where they go.²⁵

Except for changes necessary because, presumably, Tolkien wished to maintain suspense by not letting the reader or the dwarfs know the hunt overheard is the Elven-king's, the passage in The Hobbit seems to be a paraphrase of the one in Sir Orfeo, with the same images occurring in the same order and the same metaphorical use of dim to describe the sound of horns, a piece of synesthesia which is particularly appropriate in Mirkwood.

The company of dwarfs meet elves at Rivendale, where they are greeted with mocking songs that include their names. The elves sing, for instance,

No knowing, no knowing,
What brings Mister Baggins,
And Balin and Dwalin
 down into the valley
 in June
 ha! ha!²⁶

In this case the elves have good reason for knowing these names, for Gandalf has sent a message ahead,²⁷ and "elves are wondrous folk for news, and know what is going on among the peoples of the land, as quick as water flows, or quicker."²⁸ When Gildor, an elf, knows Frodo's name in The Lord of the Rings, he explains that, "We have seen you often before with Bilbo, though you may not have seen us" (I, 118). These

²⁵Sands, p. 193.

²⁶Hobbit, p. 58.

²⁷Ibid., p. 57.

²⁸Ibid., p. 59.

explanations merely emphasize a traditional characteristic of fairies: they often know a mortal's name when they first meet him, and may reveal their race by calling him by it. In the story of Diarmuid's acquisition of his "love-spot" from a personification of Youth, the magical nature of the household with which Diarmuid and his companions take shelter, apparently by accident, is revealed when the old man at the door calls "them all by their names."²⁹ When Bricriu goes to investigate a strange house which turns out to be a house of the Sidhe, he is greeted by name.³⁰ A woman of the Sidhe who has been exiled from her own world to the world of men is said to know the name of the man who happens to meet her on the beach because "she retained some of the powers proper to the world she had left."³¹ On the journey into Etzel's land, Hagen comes upon three elf-like women, referred to as "wise women" and "mermaids," who have prophetic power and who address him immediately as "Noble Knight Hagen."³² Sir Launfal, in the Middle English romance, has wandered to the edge of a "fair forest" when he is approached by a pair of gentle maidens who tell him that their lady, Dame Tryamour, wishes to see him. Although Sir Launfal has never seen the lady before, her being a daughter of the "King of Fairie" explains the sudden way in which she begins the conversation:

She seide, "Launfal, my lemman swete,
Al my joy for the I lete,
Sweting paramour."³³

²⁹ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 317.

³⁰ Cuchulain, p. 4.

³¹ Stephens, p. 163.

³² Hibelungenlied, pp. 357-358.

³³ Sands, pp. 210-212.

She, like the mermaids in The Nibelungenlied, knows not only his name but his situation and personal qualities as well.

Like Elrond's folk, the wood-elves sing, and at the elven feast in Mirkwood their songs are "loud and clear and fair,"³⁴ and the Sidhe are noted for their music. When the Red Woman leads Finn to her hill, she strikes at the side of it with a magic wand, "and on the moment a great door opened, and they heard sweet music coming from within."³⁵ The music of the Sidhe is like the enchanted stream in its ability to induce sleep: after he has obtained permission to marry a beautiful young woman of the Sidhe, Finn listens to her harp playing at the wedding feast, but when she strikes the "sleepy silver string" of her harp, Finn and all his men fall asleep, to awake the next morning outside of the mountain in which they had been feasting.³⁶ In James Stephens' retelling of Finn's boyhood, Aillen, a dark wizard of the Sidhe, uses music as a weapon with which to drug his victims. Stephens describes the elvish music richly: "the music of another world! the unearthly, dear melody of the Shí! So sweet it was that the sense strained to it, and having reached must follow drowsily in its wake, and would merge in it, and could not return again to its own place until that strange harmony was finished and the ear restored to freedom."³⁷ It is said that wounded men would sleep if they heard the music of the Sidhe, or the singing of birds around their sunny house.³⁸ The cure of Caoilte's

³⁴Hobbit, p. 153.

³⁵Gods and Fighting Men, p. 296.

³⁶Ibid., p. 292.

³⁷Stephens, p. 67.

³⁸Gods and Fighting Men, p. 209.

wounds is hastened by the visit of a woman musician from the Land of Promise, and birds from that land sing with her, making better music than Caoilte has ever heard before.³⁹ Frodo's long sleep at Rivendale, where he is cured by elvish medicine (I, 292), reflects the sleepy power to cure of the Sidhe, and Tolkien may be consciously playing on their power to make wounded men sleep when he has Bilbo tell the singing elves, "Your lullaby would waken a drunken goblin."⁴⁰ The music of the Sidhe, too, may produce other effects than sleep, for the harp of Finn's unwilling betrothed has other strings than the sleepy, silver one, including a "bright bronze string" that makes men laugh for an entire day.⁴¹

The elves in The Hobbit are much like Sidhe folk in appearance. They are a fair folk dressed in green and brown with gems on their collars,⁴² and their king wears "a crown of leaves upon his golden hair. Etain, a woman of the Sidhe, has hair the color of rubbed gold and wears a green silken dress."⁴⁴ Bodb Dearg appears to be "a young man, quiet and with pleasant looks."⁴⁵ The beauty, wisdom, and musical skill of the Sidhe, all of which qualities they share with Tolkien's elves, are expressed in King Cormac's account of a visit from Angus Og, who greets the king by name and foretells his future. Angus Og's "appearance was more beautiful than all beauty, and there were ornaments of gold on his

³⁹Gods and Fighting Men, pp. 279-280.

⁴⁰Hobbit, p. 282.

⁴¹Gods and Fighting Men, p. 292.

⁴²Hobbit, p. 150.

⁴³Ibid., p. 152.

⁴⁴Cuchulain, p. 82.

⁴⁵Gods and Fighting Men, p. 75.

dress; in his hand he held a silver harp with strings of red gold, and the sound of its strings was sweeter than all music under the sky."⁴⁶ The king of the hill Cnoc-na-righ wears clothes of green and gold,⁴⁷ and a large group of "women of the Sidhe, with green dresses on them," comesto collect the body of a man whom Cuchulain has killed.⁴⁸ The maids of Sir Launfal's fairy mistress are clad in green velvet and wear coronets full of gems,⁴⁹ and Dame Triamour herself has hair like golden wire.⁵⁰ The crown of the Elven-king, which is made of red leaves and berries in the autumn and woodland flowers in the spring,⁵¹ suggests the three crowns of Conaire, who is not an elf but is the son of the king of birds, "and in his reign there were three crowns in Ireland, the crown of flowers, and the crown of acorns, and the crown of wheat-ears."⁵²

Elrond is half man, half elf, the product of an ancient marriage between the two races. There is a hint in the first version of The Hobbit that Bilbo has some elvish blood through his mother, a Took, but Tolkien makes it absolutely clear in the Revised Edition that this is absurd.⁵³ There are a number of marriages between men and elves, and between other races, in medieval heroic literature. Odin is, of course,

⁴⁶ Gods and Fighting Men, p. 75.

⁴⁷ Cuchulain, p. 297.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁹ Sands, p. 210.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 212.

⁵¹ Hobbit, p. 168.

⁵² Cuchulain, p. 87.

⁵³ Hobbit, p. 16.

part giant,⁵⁴ and the Volsungs are descended from Sigi, "who was reported to be the son of Odin."⁵⁵ King Eochaid marries Etain, a beautiful woman of the Sidhe, and she bears him a daughter.⁵⁶ Another woman of the Sidhe falls in love with Cuchulain and almost tempts him away from his wife, Emer.⁵⁷ It is said that a daughter of the king of the Sidhe gave her love to Caoilte and that they were forced to remain apart until he was withered and old, but she was still young.⁵⁸ When Osgar her husband dies, Etain of the Fair Hair dies also, though as one of the Sidhe she would normally be immortal.⁵⁹ Three sons of Lugaidh Menn, King of Ireland, marry women of the Sidhe and join the immortal race when their normal lifetimes are over.⁶⁰ The same immortality is enjoyed by Elrond, though he is only half elven. Tolkien's elves, like the people of the Sidhe are full-sized men and women who may be distinguished from ordinary folk mainly by their beauty, wisdom, musical ability, and immortality.

An important Old Norse source of Tolkien's elf mythology, though relevant only to two sentences in The Hobbit, is the paragraph concerning the heavens in the Prose Edda. There are, according to it, Light-Elves and Dark-Elves, the former living in Alfheimr 'Elven home', the

⁵⁴Prose Edda, p. 19.

⁵⁵Volsungs, p. 43.

⁵⁶Cuchulain, p. 83.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 285-291.

⁵⁸Gods and Fighting Men, p. 77.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 314.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 77.

latter down on the earth.⁶¹ Tolkien's Wood-Elves, though they do not have the complexions of Norse Dark-Elves, are distinguished from the "High Elves" because they are "descended from the ancient tribes that never went to Faerie in the West," a land called "Elvenhome" elsewhere in Tolkien.⁶² Moreover, Tolkien names "the Light-Elves" among those High Elves who grew wiser during their sojourn in the West. The Undying Lands in the West have been, ever since the trespass of the last king of Numenor, "removed forever from the circles of the world" (III, 392); elves may return there, and the faithful members of the fellowship of the ring go there also. In the Prose Edda it is said that Gimlé, the eternal abode of "the doers of righteousness," will be in high heaven above the reach of the fires which shall "consume heaven and earth" on the last day. "But we believe that none but Light-Elves inhabit these mansions now."⁶³ None but Tolkien's High-Elves, of whom the Light-Elves are said to be part, inhabit those upper mansions at the beginning of The Lord of the Rings, but certain doers of righteousness go there after the last days of the Third Age.

The automatic doors of the elf-king's palace crash shut as the last elf passes through them, and they almost catch Bilbo several times as he is sneaking out invisibly behind a company of elves.⁶⁴ Theodore H. Gaster cites a number of examples, one of them from The Saga of the Volsungs, of doors to "the secret treasure trove or hideout of the gods

⁶¹ Prose Edda, p. 31.

⁶² Hobbit, p. 164.

⁶³ Prose Edda, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁴ Hobbit, p. 169.

or trolls" which swing automatically closed on a careless mortal who is leaving the hideout, thereby injuring his hand or foot.⁶⁵ Bilbo narrowly escapes such an injury, as does Yvain when he passes under a sharp, spring-loaded portcullis while chasing the Knight of the Fountain, and Yvain does suffer symbolic injury, for his steed is cut in two and his spurs are cut off even with his heels,⁶⁶ and similar gates trap a group of knights in Chrétien's Lancelot.⁶⁷ Tancred is trapped by doors that automatically close behind him in Jerusalem Delivered.⁶⁸ The magic door and the palace under the hill suggest that wood-elves are beginning to withdraw from the world of men, though they only use the cave at Bilbo's moment in history as a palace, treasury, and stronghold.⁶⁹ After they are defeated by the invading Sons of Gael, the Tuatha de Danaan depend on the wisdom of Manannan to find refuges for them. Selecting the most beautiful valleys and hills in Ireland, he sends the defeated tribes who will become the Sidhe-folk into these places and puts "hidden walls" around them which are opaque to ordinary people, but the people of the Sidhe can see through these walls and walk through them.⁷⁰ The wood-elves are said by Tolkien to have withdrawn "after the coming of Men" and taken "more and more to the gloaming and the

⁶⁵The Oldest Stories in the World (Boston, 1958), pp. 45-46.

⁶⁶Chrétien, p. 192.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 299.

⁶⁸Tasso, p. 141.

⁶⁹Hobbit, p. 165.

⁷⁰Gods and Fighting Men, p. 73.

dusk."⁷¹ In Bilbo's time the withdrawal has already begun, for Elrond lives in a hidden valley, and it is dusk every time Bilbo meets elves in The Hobbit.⁷² Tolkien has clearly imitated the people of the Sidhe who appear in Old Irish stories, for his elves resemble them in many ways, but he has used the scanty elf lore in The Prose Edda as well.

DELVINGS

Dwellings underground are common in Tolkien's fiction: hobbits, or at least the more conservative ones, live in burrows; trolls have treasure caves; goblins live in crude tunnels, elves in neat caverns, dragons under mountains, and dwarfs in well-hewn underground halls. The dwarfs pass twice underground on their journey in The Hobbit, once under the Misty Mountains and once through the elf king's palace. Norse trolls, discussed in Chapter Four above, commonly live, like their English counterpart Grendel, in underground lairs. When Ragnarok approaches, the dwarfs, who are called "masters of the rocks," are said to roar (or groan) "beside their stone doors."⁷³ Though the dwarf door in The Hobbit, "made to look exactly like the side of the mountain,"⁷⁴ resembles the doors of the Sidhe in that it is invisible from the outside, dwarfs can neither see nor walk through the closed door, so it precisely resembles the door which leads to the underground portion of John's tower in Chrétien's romance of Cligés. This door, "made of hard stone with such skill and art that you cannot find the crack," opens easily in an apparently unbroken wall to reveal a stairway leading down

⁷¹Hobbit, p. 165.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 57, 167, 279.

⁷³Poetic Edda, p. 21; Prose Edda, p. 80.

⁷⁴Hobbit, p. 33.

to an elaborate underground dwelling.⁷⁵ The dwarfs Heidrek encounters at sunset live behind "doors" which are not described and may be purely magical openings,⁷⁶ not the well-fitted mechanical contrivances of Tolkien's dwarfs and Chrétien's John. In The Poetic Edda, dwarfs are said to be "in the earth," and Dvalin's dwarf-tribe is said to have left the rocks to make a home in fields of sand.⁷⁷ The Sidhe live, of course, in hills in Old Irish tales, and the King of Fairy lives in a green country underground in Sir Orfeo,⁷⁸ but mortals live in similar houses in several medieval stories. Wishing to conceal Deirdre from men because he knows the trouble she will cause, her father has her reared in house with a roof of green sods by the side of a round green hillock.⁷⁹ Tristan and Isolt live for some time in a cavern dedicated to the Goddess of Love,⁸⁰ and after his escape from King Siggeir's stocks, Sigmund takes refuge in "an underground house in the wood."⁸¹ The famous Icelandic outlaw, Gisli, hides underground often during his long outlawry, once in the underground room of an old woman; this room suggests the sunny hole of Bilbo in that it at least has two openings, one in her kitchen and one by the river,⁸² and during his stay with Ingjald, Gisli "is always in an underground room when anyone comes to

⁷⁵ Chrétien, pp. 163-164.

⁷⁶ Heidrek, p. 83.

⁷⁷ Poetic Edda, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁸ Sands, pp. 194-196.

⁷⁹ Cuchulain, p. 106.

⁸⁰ Gottfried, p. 261.

⁸¹ Volsungs, p. 56.

⁸² Gisli, p. 35.

the island."⁸³ Though the only specific parallels here seem to be between the dwarf door in Tolkien and the doors in The Poetic Edda, Heidrek, and Cligés, these underground houses are part of a general background out of which the Hobbit holes and other cave-like homes may have been conceived.

Caves are used both as dwellings and as highways in Orlando Furioso and Jerusalem Delivered. Bradamant falls into a deep cave in a mountain and discovers, not a Goblin fortress, but the cave of Merlin, a sacred cavern where the wizard's soul still lives, and there she meets a prophetess who has Gandalf's ability to find the way through rough cavern roads:

The way they went was dark and unaccessible,
By secret vaults and hollows of the hill,
To find it out had been a thing impossible
But with the guide of knowledge great and skill.
At last they come unto a path more passible,
By which they cease not to ascend until
They quite had left the dark and lothsome place
And saw the beams of Phoebus' cheerful face.⁸⁴

The motif of a wizard leading ordinary people through dark and secret underground passages, found in both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, occurs twice in Jerusalem Delivered. The pagan wizard, Ismen, leads Soliman into Jerusalem through a tunnel built by Herod, a "secret path, though dark and deep."⁸⁵ The Christian wizard leads the two knights who are seeking Rinaldo

headlong down,⁸⁶
under the flood, through vast and hollow deeps;

⁸³ Gisli, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Ariosto, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Tasso, p. 210.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 292.

and, as they pass lodes of jewels and ore, the wizard explains that only he alone can guide them there:

You are within the hollow womb (quoth he)
Of fertile earth, the nurse of all things made;
And but you brought and guided are by me,
Her sacred entrails could no wight invade.⁸⁷

The elf-king's palace, "a great cave, from which countless smaller ones opened out on every side," winds "far underground" and has "many passages and wide halls."⁸⁸ Strongly suggesting this is the underground palace of the Christian wizard:

It was a cave, high, wide, large, ample, plain,
With goodly rooms, halls, chambers, galleries.⁸⁹

The wizard is like the elf-king in that he is attended by a sort of court, "a hundred grooms," and the "precious wine" in his dwelling⁹⁰ parallels the "wine of Dorminion" which is part of Bilbo's plan to escape from the elf-king's halls.⁹¹ That a river flows under those halls strengthens the possibility that Tasso's description of the wizard's dwelling actually influenced Tolkien's description of them, for on the way to his dwelling the wizard leads his visitors by "spacious caves" overflowing with water, and these are said to be the origins of "seas, rivers, floods, lakes, fountains, wells, and springs."⁹² The elf-king's halls are certainly plainer and less marvelous than the

⁸⁷Tasso, p. 293.

⁸⁸Hobbit, p. 165.

⁸⁹Tasso, p. 294.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 295.

⁹¹Hobbit, p. 175.

⁹²Tasso, p. 292.

wizards, but they have many of the same features. These features, and the strong similarity between Bradamant's adventures underground and the dwarfs' indicate that Tolkien's accounts of underground journeys and dwellings may have been particularly influenced by the reading of Ariosto and Tasso.

CONCLUSION

Echoes of medieval sources in Part III of The Hobbit are few but uncommonly clear. Mirkwood suggests in character as well as in name the Myrkviðr of the Eddas, and descriptions of it strongly resemble passages in James Stephens' retelling of an Old Irish tale and in Jerusalem Delivered. The magical stream may be derived from sources other than those surveyed, for no very plausible source of it has been found, but clearly the descriptions of white deer and of the elf-king's hunt are derived from medieval fairy lore, and the hunt seems to echo a specific passage in the romance of Sir Orfeo. Tolkien's elves are modeled, with little change, on the Irish people of the Sidhe, though there are suggestions of some of their traits in the elves of the Eddas and in fairy folk of Middle English romance. Like Tolkien's elves, the Sidhe-folk know men's names, are expert at music, and dress in green. Though they are immortals with a homeland in the West, they occasionally marry with mortals and they have withdrawn behind magic doors in the sides of hills and taken to appearing mostly at twilight. The distinction between Wood-Elves and Light-Elves in The Hobbit appears to be derived from a discussion of elves in The Prose Edda, and the many underground dwellings and journeys in Tolkien's fiction follow precedents, not only from Celtic fairy-tales, but from Old Norse sagas and Italian romantic epics as well. Medieval Celtic echoes, weak in the rest of The Hobbit, are very strong on the elf-road through Mirkwood.

Chapter Seven

Deserts, Dragons and Dragon Hoards

The final part of The Hobbit tells of the dwarfs' encounter with the dragon, of his death, and of the allotting of the treasure he leaves behind. Because the dragon is the most important new character in this section and because dragons occur so often in and seem so characteristic of medieval heroic literature, Smaug will occupy the center of this chapter. First will be discussed the desolation which surrounds his mountain, the absence of life and the broken remains of the town he has destroyed. The events of the encounter with and the slaying of the dragon will be compared with similar events in medieval fiction, and an attempt will be made to identify the medieval works which may have suggested his physical appearance and means of fighting. Finally, the contents of Smaug's hoard will be examined and compared with similar treasure held by dragons in medieval fiction.

DESERTS

When the dwarfs have been resupplied by the Lake-men, they row toward the Mountain and land in the Desolation of the Dragon, a bleak and empty region which once was "fair and green," though now only sparse grass and the burned stumps of trees and bushes remain.¹ The condition of this land suggests that of Mordor in The Lord of the Rings, where barren earth results from Sauron's devilish technology and his hatred of growing things. It is apparently the dragon's nature to destroy other living things, for he plans after the destruction of the lake-

¹Hobbit, pp. 194-195.

town "to set all the shorelands ablaze and wither every field and pasture."² Beowulf's dragon lives in a wilderness.³ Though there is no reference to his having caused its desolation, he does systematically burn and destroy living things when he discovers that someone has stolen his precious cup: "Then the fiend began to vomit forth flames, to burn the noble dwellings; the gleam of fire blazed forth, a terror to the sons of men; the hateful creature flying in the air would leave there no thing with life. The serpent's warfare was widely visible, the vengeance of the devastator."⁴ Nithhogg, a flying dragon in Norse mythology, gnaws at the roots of the World-tree,⁵ which, writes Turville-Petre, "upholds the universe, even as the main pillars uphold a house."⁶ The fiery dragon in Tristan is said to have "burdened the land and people with . . . an excess of harm," and he lives in the wild.⁷ There are many other wastelands in the literature examined, some of them ruled by evil beings. Grendel and his dam "dwell in a land unknown, wolf-haunted slopes, wind-swept headlands, perilous marshpaths."⁸ In the Voluspá the realms of the giants and of the dead are bare and deadly: a river from the giants' home "pours through poisoned vales with swords and daggers," and Hel's house is a place of cold and venom where Nithhogg sucks dead men's blood and the wolf tears them.⁹ In Jerusalem Delivered,

²Hobbit, p. 236.

³Beowulf, l. 2297.

⁴Ibid., ll. 2312-2317; quoted from Hall's translation, p. 137.

⁵Poetic Edda, p. 97.

⁶Turville-Petre, p. 279.

⁷Tristan, p. 159.

⁸Beowulf, ll. 1357-1359; Hall, p. 89.

⁹Poetic Edda, pp. 16-17.

the evil king, Aladine, destroys all the trees and buildings around his city and poisons the wells. This Sauron-like deed is performed with fire:

The suburbs first, flat with the ground he plain'd,¹⁰
And burnt their buildings with devouring fire.

Perhaps the most famous medieval wasteland, however, is that which results when the keeper of the Grail is wounded with a spear,¹¹ and Percival comes upon a beleaguered castle outside of which there is "nothing but sea and water and ravaged fields."¹² All of these accounts and others like them may contribute an echoing depth to the description of the dragon's wasteland, but a sufficient source for the Desolation of Smaug, and the only clear one, is the ravaging of the Beowulf dragon.

As they approach the Mountain, Bilbo and the dwarfs see in the bare river valley the broken remains of the town of Dale, "grey ruins of ancient houses, towers, and walls," and Balin observes that the valley was "rich and pleasant in the days when the bells rang in that town."¹³ Passing through Dale again after the dragon's departure, the company fords the river where a bridge that Balin remembers is found broken, "most of its stones . . . now only boulders in the shallow noisy stream."¹⁴ The ruins of earlier civilizations in The Lord of the Rings are too numerous to require listing, but among the earliest encountered

¹⁰Tasso, p. 21.

¹¹Roger Sherman Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (New York, 1963), pp. 121-122.

¹²Loomis, Romances, p. 36.

¹³Hobbit, p. 195.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 232.

are stone pillars on the Barrow-downs (I, 190) and the "wide ring of ancient stone-work" which was the base of an ancient watchtower on Weathertop (I, 251). Melancholy contemplation of the fallen architectural glories of the past is common in Old English verse. "The Wanderer," contemplating the "old work of giants" observes the passing away of glory:

A hero knows how dread it will be
When all the wealth of the world lies waste,
When, blown by wind, the walls stand
Ruined with rime, storm-beaten dwellings.¹⁵

The last survivor of a noble race, who fills the barrow which is later haunted by Beowulf's foe, laments the passing of the joys of the hall.¹⁶ But the clearest parallel with Tolkien's description of stone ruins is the Old English fragment called "The Ruin," which describes with wonder the remains of a great stone town:

Wondrous is this wall-stone, broken by Wyrd;
the strong places are cracked--the work of giants crumbles.
Roofs are fallen, the towers in ruins,
The barred gate broken down, with frost on the lime.¹⁷

This passage parallels the first description of Dale in its specific references to houses, towers, and walls. Balin's recollection of the bells of Dale may be a brief echo of the imaginative reconstructions of transitory glory, of such things as "the bright cup,"¹⁸ "the joy of the harp,"¹⁹ and "the fortresses with halls for bathing,"²⁰ which occur in

¹⁵ Word-Hoard, p. 39.

¹⁶ Beowulf, ll. 2262-2265.

¹⁷ Word-Hoard, p. 61.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹ Beowulf, l. 2262.

²⁰ Word-Hoard, p. 61.

"The Wanderer," Beowulf, and "The Ruin." One non-English description of a ruined town, the town which Percival finds surrounded by barren fields, is not a source for the ruins of Dale because the town is substantially intact--its walls cracked, gates broken, and towers roofless²¹--but it does suggest strongly the decadent state of Minas Tirith in The Lord of the Rings. The stone ruins by the Mountain and other similar ruins in Tolkien's fiction seem to be imitated from the ruins described in Old English poetry.

DRAGONS

There are many dragons in medieval literature. Gnawing at the roots of the World-tree in Eddic mythology is the great serpent Nithhogg 'the Dread Biter',²² who is called a dragon and flies up from darkness bearing the bodies of men on his wings,²³ and there are other serpents working the destruction of the great tree.²⁴ A huge dragon followed by "a train of serpents, paddocks, and vipers" rushes to defend Iceland from an invading warlock in the Heimskringla,²⁵ and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 793 reports "whirlwinds and fiery dragons flying across the sky" in Northumbria.²⁶ Yvain rescues a lion from a dragon in Chrétien's poem,²⁷ Frotho slays a dragon in Saxo's History,²⁸ Tristan

²¹Loomis, Romances, 37.

²²Poetic Edda, p. 97.

²³Ibid., 26.

²⁴Ibid., p. 98.

²⁵Heimskringla, p. 33.

²⁶Word-Hoard, p. 274.

²⁷Chrétien, p. 223.

²⁸Saxo, p. xci.

kills a fire-drake which has been devouring people and wasting land,²⁹ and the slaying of "brennyng dragons" is listed among the accomplishments of Gawain in Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle.³⁰ In Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, young Merlin proves his wisdom by revealing that the cause of poor foundations under King Vortigern's tower is an underground pool, within which two dragons sleep in two hollow stones,³¹ a ball of fire "in the likeness of a dragon" gives Uther Pendragon his name,³² and Arthur has a vision of a dragon flying from the east.³³ Cuchulain kills a great worm which has a mouth so large that it seems "that one of the houses would fit into its gullet,"³⁴ and a huge, fire-breathing serpent obstructs the knights on their way to free Rinaldo from Armida's island in Jerusalem Delivered.³⁵ The most famous dragons, however, and the ones which seem to have most influenced Tolkien's portrayal of Smaug are those killed by Beowulf and Sigurd. Beowulf's fire-drake is told of only in the Old English poem, but the story of Sigurd is told in both Eddas, in The Saga of the Volsungs, and in The Nibelungenlied.

The story of the arousing and slaying of Beowulf's dragon parallels at many points the story of Smaug in The Hobbit. Both have lived in an underground vault full of treasure undisturbed for many years--Beowulf's

²⁹ Tristan, p. 157.

³⁰ Sands, p. 354.

³¹ Geoffrey, p. 135.

³² Ibid., p. 172.

³³ Ibid., p. 211.

³⁴ Cuchulain, p. 76.

³⁵ Tasso, pp. 312-313.

foe for three hundred winters,³⁶ Smaug for over one hundred and seventy years (III, 460)--and neither has derived any benefit from the treasure: the Beowulf worm is "not one whit the better for it,"³⁷ and Tolkien's dragons "never enjoy a brass ring of it."³⁸ Each dragon is asleep on his treasure in the midst of a deserted place³⁹ when a solitary man, an outlaw in Beowulf, Bilbo in The Hobbit, enters the vault and steals a valuable cup. Bilbo's is called "a great two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry,"⁴⁰ and the Beowulf cup is a maðumfaet mæere 'famous precious vessel'.⁴¹ When Beowulf's dragon awakens, he discovers the footprints of the intruder and begins to look for him: "Glowing and fierce at heart, he went completely round the barrow oftentimes; there was not any man there, in that deserted place." He cannot find the cup, and he knows that a man has stolen it, so he has joyful thoughts of fighting.⁴² When Smaug awakens, he does not see footprints, but he smells a strangeness in the air and misses the cup. Then, like the Old English dragon, he hunts "round and round the mountainsides," bathing the vicinity of the dwarfs' door with flame.⁴³ Both dragons fly at night, and Beowulf's foe, after discovering the cup's absence, waits for the night and then goes "forth with flame" to "burn magnificent

³⁶Beowulf, l. 2278.

³⁷Ibid., l. 2277.

³⁸Hobbit, p. 35.

³⁹Beowulf, l. 2298. Hobbit, p. 195.

⁴⁰Hobbit, p. 206.

⁴¹Beowulf, l. 2405.

⁴²Ibid., ll. 2296-2298.

⁴³Hobbit, pp. 207-208.

dwellings."⁴⁴ Smaug, first discovering his loss at night, flies out immediately and retires to his hoard when dawn breaks.⁴⁵ During the day he has a dialogue with Bilbo which has no equivalent in Beowulf, but when the next night falls, Smaug "rose in fire" to destroy the town of Esgaroth,⁴⁶ where one sweep of his tail smashes the roof of the Great House.⁴⁷ This compares with the Beowulf's dragon's going "forth with flame" to "burn magnificent dwellings," but Smaug does not return like the Beowulf dragon, for he meets his bane on that raid. The noble archer, Bard, stands almost deserted among burning houses,⁴⁸ and all but one of Beowulf's companions desert him when they see him "encircled with fire."⁴⁹ Bard shoots Smaug in the hollow of the left breast,⁵⁰ and the other dragon dies when Wiglaf strikes him "a little lower down" than the head and Beowulf cleaves him in two.⁵¹ There are many differences between the two tales, but the details they have in common are given, almost invariably, in the same order in both narratives. One final point of similarity is Tolkien's reference to the waters outside Smaug's gate rising "in fierce whistling steam" as the angry dragon leaves his cave,⁵² for when Beowulf approaches the dragon's lair, he sees "by the wall a rocky arch" from which bursts out a stream: "Hot

⁴⁴Beowulf, ll. 2302-2313.

⁴⁵Hobbit, p. 210.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 222.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 236.

⁴⁸Hobbit, p. 237.

⁴⁹Beowulf, l. 2595.

⁵⁰Hobbit, p. 237.

⁵¹Beowulf, ll. 2694-2711.

⁵²Hobbit, p. 208.

was the welling of the flood with deadly fire."⁵³ Tolkien's own illustration of "The Front Gate" shows water and steam issuing from a stone-reinforced arch in the mountain wall.⁵⁴

Beowulf does not, however, account entirely for Smaug, for there is no reference to the Beowulf dragon's talking or having limbs. Beowulf challenges the monster with a battle cry and is answered only by roaring flames,⁵⁵ but Smaug talks quite intelligently. Though referred to as a draca 'dragon', Beowulf's bane is frequently called a wyrm 'serpent', and he behaves, except for his flying, breathing fire, and guarding gold, much like a very large and intelligent snake. Though he is large enough to discomfort two great warriors and burn splendid dwellings, the dragon is not very thick about the middle, for Beowulf is able to cut him in two with the waelseax 'battle-knife' that he wears on his corselet,⁵⁶ a weapon certainly shorter than the sword which he has just broken. It is, therefore, likely that the Beowulf dragon is shaped like a serpent rather than like a lizard, but Smaug is lizard-like according to Tolkien's illustration on the treasure map,⁵⁷ and he is said to have claws⁵⁸ and lie in his cave like an "immeasurable bat."⁵⁹ Furthermore, though the wyrm turns two of Beowulf's blows, two others cut him without the fighters' having made any apparent effort to find

⁵³Beowulf, ll. 2542-2549.

⁵⁴Hobbit (Boston), p. 214.

⁵⁵Beowulf, ll. 2550-2551.

⁵⁶Ibid., l. 2703.

⁵⁷Hobbit, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 216.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 206.

a particular weak spot, so other sources must be found, not only for Smaug's speaking and having claws, but for his being armored in all but one place. These sources seem to be the Norse tales of the killing of Fafnir, who resembles Smaug further in that he has a name and has acquired his treasure by violence rather than by accident,⁶⁰ and Fafnir's treasure, like Smaug's, was originally taken from a dwarf.

The Beowulf dragon is unknown until an outlawed man, looking for shelter, enters his barrow, and the man's help is needed to find the barrow again,⁶¹ but Fafnir is well known, and men avoid his dwelling at Gnitahead for fear of him. When Regin describes him to Sigurd, the hero answers, "I know the nature of that dragon, though I am but young, and I have heard it said that none dares to go against him because he is so great and cruel."⁶² In this way the Fafnir of The Saga of the Volsungs resembles Smaug, and he is talkative in the Norse versions of his death. Sigurd kills him by digging a pit in the path down which he goes to drink and by driving a marvelously sharp sword into his heart. The Poetic Edda records the thrust to the heart,⁶³ and The Prose Edda says merely that the sword was thrust through him,⁶⁴ but details of Fafnir's death-blow in the Saga parallel details of Smaug's in The Hobbit. Regin tells Sigmund that he must strike at the dragon's heart from beneath, so Sigmund thrusts "the sword in under the left shoulder,

⁶⁰ Volsungs, p. 86.

⁶¹ Beowulf, l. 2410.

⁶² Volsungs, p. 85.

⁶³ Poetic Edda, pp. 371-372.

⁶⁴ Prose Edda, p. 153.

as deep as the hilt."⁶⁵ Bilbo has heard that dragons are softer underneath, "especially in the region of the--er--chest," but Smaug informs him that his information is obsolete. Still Bilbo observes an unarmed patch "in the hollow of his left breast,"⁶⁶ and, after Bard receives this information by way of the helpful thrush, he buries his arrow "barb, shaft and feather" into the hollow of the dragon's left breast.⁶⁷ The fact that the Fafnir of The Saga of the Volsungs has a shoulder at all connects him further with Smaug; the Fafnir of the Eddas may well be a great serpent like Beowulf's dragon, for no mention is made of limbs in The Poetic Edda, and The Prose Edda says that Fafnir has become a serpent and that he glides down to the water.⁶⁸ There are similarities between Bilbo's talk with Smaug and Sigurd's talk with Fafnir. Smaug immediately asks for Bilbo's name, and the hobbit answers with a series of riddles: he begins, "I come from under the hill, and under the hills and over the hills my path has led. And through the air, I am he that walks unseen." This is the way to talk to dragons, Tolkien explains, because "you don't want to reveal your proper name."⁶⁹ In The Poetic Edda and The Saga of the Volsungs, Fafnir asks Sigurd's name, and he replies, "My race is unknown to men; I am called the Noble Beast, and I have no father or mother, but I have journeyed alone."⁷⁰ The Poetic Edda explains that Sigurd conceals his name because it was thought that

⁶⁵Volsungs, pp. 95-96.

⁶⁶Hobbit, p. 216.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 237.

⁶⁸Prose Edda, p. 153.

⁶⁹Hobbit, pp. 212-213.

⁷⁰Volsungs, p. 97.

a dying man had great power if he cursed his enemy by name.⁷¹ Bilbo's riddling answer is truthful, but Sigurd's is a lie. Smaug replies, "So I can well believe, but that is hardly your usual name,"⁷² and Fafnir accuses Sigurd of lying,⁷³ but the results of the dragons' remarks are nearly the same. Bilbo carelessly reveals important information in his subsequent riddles,⁷⁴ and Sigurd reveals his name.⁷⁵ The great size of Smaug is certainly equaled by Fafnir, for the crag on which the Saga dragon lies to drink measures thirty fathoms.⁷⁶

After he has slain Fafnir, Sigurd accidentally tastes the dragon's blood and suddenly acquires understanding of the speech of birds.⁷⁷ Birds who give information are fairly common in Old Norse stories; indeed, Odin is served by two ravens who fly about the world to gather tidings and then sit on his shoulders and tell him all they have learned.⁷⁸ But the thrush who lands on Bard's shoulder and brings him news of Smaug's weakness echoes directly another source, for Bard, "a descendant in long line of Girion, Lord of Dale," is said to understand the bird because "he was of the race of Dale."⁷⁹ He is of noble lineage, and this lineage gives him understanding of bird-speech. Likewise, in

⁷¹Poetic Edda, p. 372.

⁷²Hobbit, p. 213.

⁷³Volsungs, p. 97.

⁷⁴Hobbit, p. 213.

⁷⁵Volsungs, p. 97.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 101; Poetic Edda, p. 380.

⁷⁸Prose Edda, p. 51.

⁷⁹Hobbit, p. 237.

the Rigsthula, a poem describing the derivation of the three social classes from a wandering god, the representative of the highest class has a son who learns "bird-chatter" and is receiving advice from a wise crow when the poem breaks off.⁸⁰ Another point which suggests several medieval sources is Bard's disappearance after the dragon's death and his sudden reappearance to declare, "I am the slayer of the dragon."⁸¹ In The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, Ragnar kills the dragon which encircles a princess' bower, but he leaves and reappears only when the king rises at the Thing to demand that the slayer identify himself.⁸² Sir Tristan is so worn by his fight with a dragon that he faints, and credit for the slaying is taken by a dishonest seneschal, but Tristan brings forward the monster's tongue and declares, "I slew the dragon, Sire."⁸³ Bard's conflict with the town master, which he nobly avoids in the interests of peace, resembles Tristan's conflict with the seneschal. Another detail in The Hobbit which suggests the dragon-slayings in Tristan and The Saga of the Volsungs is the horrible cry Smaug emits as he feels his death blow, "a shriek that deafened men, felled trees, and split stone."⁸⁴ The din of the "death-agony" of Ragnar's dragon is said to be so great "that the whole bower shook,"⁸⁵ and when Tristan drives his sword up to the hilt into his dragon's heart, "this dying

⁸⁰ Poetic Edda, p. 212-216.

⁸¹ Hobbit, p. 238.

⁸² Volsungs, p. 194-197.

⁸³ Tristan, p. 189.

⁸⁴ Hobbit, p. 237.

⁸⁵ Volsungs, p. 194.

monster let out a roar from its vile throat as grim and grisly as though heaven and earth were falling, and this death-cry echoed far over the countryside, and greatly startled Tristan."⁸⁶ The vast final throes of Smaug, if not his shriek, may reflect The Saga of the Volsungs, for Fafnir strikes about with his head and tail, which shatter everything before them,⁸⁷ and Smaug's throes are said to splinter Esgaroth "to sparks and gledes."⁸⁸

The Old English and Old Norse sources contain only a minimum of physical description of their dragons, but Tolkien describes Smaug quite thoroughly. The vast dragon is "red-golden" and has wings, claws, and a "huge coiled tail" when Bilbo first sees him, and his "long pale belly" is "crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed."⁸⁹ He is "armored above and below with iron scales and hard gems."⁹⁰ In Jerusalem Delivered there is a fire-breathing dragon "armed with golden scales,"⁹¹ but a more probable source of the dragon's appearance seems to be King Arthur's marvelous dream of a dragon, a passage which first appeared in Geoffrey's History⁹² and was elaborated by the author of The Alliterative Morte Arthure,⁹³ which poem Malory used as a source when he retold the dream as follows:

⁸⁶ Tristan, p. 161.

⁸⁷ Volsungs, p. 96.

⁸⁸ Hobbit, p. 238.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 206.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

⁹¹ Tasso, pp. 312-313.

⁹² Geoffrey, p. 210.

⁹³ Mossé, pp. 252-256.

And as the king lay in his cabin on the ship, he fell in a slumbering and dreamed a marvelous dream: him seemed that a dreadful dragon did drown much of his people, and he came flying out of the west, and his shoulders shone as gold, his belly like mails of marvelous hue, his tail full of tatters, his feet full of fine sable, and his claws like fine gold; and an hideous flame of fire flew out of his mouth, like as the land and water had flamed all of fire.⁹⁴

Besides flying and spewing fire, this dragon has several peculiar qualities in common with Smaug: he has claws and limbs, his shoulders are golden, and his underside shines "like mails of marvelous hue," which seems an excellent description of Smaug's diamond coat.⁹⁵ Moreover, in Malory's description and in its immediate source, the dragon's wings are explicitly mentioned. The dragons in The Saga of the Volsungs, The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, The Heimskringla, and Tristan seem unable to fly, and, though those in Beowulf, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and Geoffrey's History can fly, there is no mention of wings. It is possible that flight is magically achieved without wings, for Beowulf's bane flies only at night,⁹⁶ the dragon in The Chronicle appears in the company of whirlwinds,⁹⁷ and Geoffrey's dragon fights a flying bear which is not said to have wings.⁹⁸ Among stories discussed so far, only Le Morte D'Arthur, The Alliterative Morte Arthure, and The Poetic Edda describe dragons with wings, and only the two Arthurian works

⁹⁴Malory, I, 134-135.

⁹⁵Hobbit, p. 216.

⁹⁶Beowulf, l. 2273.

⁹⁷Word-Hoard, p. 274.

⁹⁸Geoffrey, p. 210.

describe dragons which have claws and the ability to fly.⁹⁹ Arthur's dream seems, moreover, to have suggested more than Smaug's static appearance, for it has elements in common with his attack on the lake-town. Malory's dragon drowns many people, and flame flies from his mouth "like as the land and water had flamed all of fire."¹⁰⁰ During Smaug's attack on the lake-town, the water ripples "red as fire beneath the awful beating of his wings,"¹⁰¹ and later the trees on the shore are said to shine like copper and blood in the light of the dragon's passage overhead.¹⁰²

When Bilbo mentions that Smaug has enemies, the dragon boasts of his invulnerability in a speech which concludes, "My armor is like tenfold shields my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!"¹⁰³ This passage suggests the account of dragon-fighting in Gottfried's Tristan, where the beast brings smoke and steam into battle, "and other equipment in the shape of fire and teeth, and also claws with which to strike, so sharp and finely set that they were keener than a razor."¹⁰⁴ Smaug's armor like shields suggests, of course, the "marvelous mail" of the dragon in Arthur's dream, the tail like a thunderbolt parallels

⁹⁹ One description of a dragon, outside of the arbitrary limits of this study, which includes all of these details and resembles at many points Tolkien's description of Smaug is that in the First Book of Spenser's Faerie Queene (Poetical Works, p. 58), xi, 8-18.

¹⁰⁰ Malory, I, .134-135.

¹⁰¹ Hobbit, p. 235.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁰⁴ Tristan, p. 160.

Fafnir's striking with his tail "so all things before it burst asunder,"¹⁰⁵ and the hurricane-like wings suggest the whirlwinds which flew with dragons over Northumbria.¹⁰⁶ Smaug's death-dealing breath deserves attention because he is unlike several medieval dragons in that he breathes only fire. The "venom" of the dragon, not the fire, kills Beowulf,¹⁰⁷ and in both full accounts of Fafnir's death, the dragon blows out poison,¹⁰⁸ as do the dragons in The Heimskringla¹⁰⁹ and in Jerusalem Delivered.¹¹⁰ The only dragons who are described as fighting with fire but without poisons are those in Tristan and in the accounts of Arthur's dream. Both beasts fight with fire and teeth or talons. Arthur's dragon is said to fly like a falcon, and his method of fighting resembles such a bird's, for the worm soars very high and then dives rapidly, striking with his talons. The Alliterative Morte Arthure describes this as follows:

Than wandrys the worme awaye to hys heghttez,
Commes glydande fro the clowddez and cowpez full even,
Towches hym wyth his talounez and terez his back
Betwyx the taile and the toppe ten fote large.¹¹¹

This resembles Smaug's method of attack against Esgaroth: he circles "for a while high in the air," then swoops straight down spouting flame, and though he does not strike with his talons because of the nearness

¹⁰⁵Volsungs, p. 96.

¹⁰⁶Word-Hoard, p. 274.

¹⁰⁷Beowulf, ll. 2711-2715.

¹⁰⁸Poetic Edda, p. 371; Volsungs, p. 96.

¹⁰⁹Heimskringla, p. 33.

¹¹⁰Tasso, p. 312.

¹¹¹Mossé, p. 256.

of the water, he does smash buildings with his tail as he passes.¹¹²
 The devouring of half of Tristan's horse by the dragon¹¹³ may have suggested Smaug's eating the dwarfs' ponies.¹¹⁴

It may be noticed that parallels with the Smaug episode have been found in literature written in English, Norse, German, Latin, and Italian, but there seem to be no real dragons in medieval Celtic heroic literature: the monster from which Owein saves a lion in the Welsh romance, The Lady at the Fountain, is no more than a large snake,¹¹⁵ and the "great worm" which Cuchulain slays at Curoi's dun resembles Smaug in size only.¹¹⁶

DRAGON HOARDS

Three descriptions of Smaug's hoard give a fairly complete account of its contents, and the hoards of Beowulf's dragon and of Sigurd's are similarly described. When Bilbo first visits the dragon, he sees on the floor "countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light." Along the walls are "coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears," and Bilbo steals a large cup.¹¹⁷ The dwarfs' discussion of the treasure yields detailed descriptions of spears, mailcoats, and a jewel, but the only new item is a precious necklace.¹¹⁸ The dwarfs arm themselves

¹¹²Hobbit, p. 236.

¹¹³Tristan, p. 160.

¹¹⁴Hobbit, p. 209.

¹¹⁵Mabinogion, p. 179.

¹¹⁶Cuchulain, p. 76.

¹¹⁷Hobbit, p. 206.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 220.

and fill their pockets with jewels when they visit the hoard later, but the only new pieces of treasure mentioned are golden harps.¹¹⁹ The ancient man who buries the Beowulf treasure laments that he has no comrades to enjoy the treasure that is his, and his lament specifies swords, drinking cups, helmets, armor, and possibly harps.¹²⁰ The description of what Wiglaf sees in the lair after the dragon's death adds "many an armlet, twisted with cunning" to the list of treasures. The passage resembles the description of Bilbo's first sight of Smaug, when he sees under the dragon "countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought" and then discerns arms on the dark walls.¹²¹ Wiglaf sees by the dragon's resting place "many a costly ornament--glittering gold lying on the ground, marvels on the wall."¹²² Later "collars and brooches" are said to have been in the hoard, and, if these may be loosely equated with the necklace in Smaug's lair, then all of the forms of treasure in that lair, only jewels and spears are absent from the Dragon's barrow in Beowulf. The treasure which Sigurd takes from Fafnir's cave includes a great store of gold, a helmet, a sword, and a golden byrnie,¹²³ and, like the spears made for King Bladorthin,¹²⁴ Sigurd's weapons are adorned with gold.¹²⁵ After the hero arrives at Heimir's homestead, it is "thought a great delight to gaze on the byrnies

¹¹⁹ Hobbit, p. 228.

¹²⁰ Beowulf, ll. 2252-2265.

¹²¹ Hobbit, p. 206.

¹²² Beowulf, ll. 2756-2759.

¹²³ Poetic Edda, p. 385; Volsungs, p. 103.

¹²⁴ Hobbit, p. 220.

¹²⁵ Volsungs, p. 110.

and helmets and great rings, the golden cups and weapons of many kinds."¹²⁶ Sigurd carries his treasure in two great chests, and his horse is so strong that it can carry Sigurd as well as the gold.¹²⁷ This detail may be the source, however reduced in Tolkien's version, of Bilbo's chosen portion of Smaug's treasure: "In the end he would only take two small chests, one filled with silver, and the other with gold, such as one strong pony could carry."¹²⁸

Fafnir's lair contains no harps, jewels, silver, or necklaces, but from it Sigmund does take to wear a golden mailcoat¹²⁹ which suggests the coat that Bilbo wears from Smaug's lair, a small coat forged of mithril, the "silver steel"¹³⁰ which is said in The Lord of the Rings to be far more precious than gold (I, 413). The marvelous coat saves Frodo's life in the long romance, and when Bilbo gives it to him, the coat is said to be "close woven of many rings, as supple almost as linen, cold as ice, and hard as steel" (I, 363). Light blade-proof coats appear several times in the literature surveyed. Ragnar Lodbrok's wife gives him a present on his departure to invade England:

Gladly I give thee this grey-hued shirt
Woven all of hair, without seam or hem.
Within it no blade can cut thee or wound
By the grace of the gods: it was hollowed to them.¹³¹

In The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise there is a "silken shirt" that is

¹²⁶Volsungs, p. 112.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 103.

¹²⁸Hobbit, p. 276.

¹²⁹Volsungs, p. 102.

¹³⁰Hobbit, p. 228.

¹³¹Volsungs, p. 237.

so sure a protection that no weapon can bite it, and Christopher Tolkien states that "the idea of a skyrta against which all weapons are powerless is extremely common in the late sagas."¹³² The light, close-woven silver jacket of Bilbo seems to be imitated, however, from a hauberk which Chrétien describes in Eric et Enide as "so fine that not a mesh could be cut from it It was all made of worked silver in tiny meshes triple-woven; and it was made with such skill that I can assure you that no one who put it on would have been more uncomfortable or sore because of it, than if he had put on a silk jacket over his undershirt."¹³³ About the mithril coat Bilbo observes, "You hardly feel any weight when you put it on" (I, 363).

The item in the hoard which Thorin most values is the Arkenstone, which shines "of its own inner light."¹³⁴ In Old Irish tales precious stones are often said to glow: stones brought by Sidhe-folk light a house at night,¹³⁵ jewels on spears "flame in the night like the rays of the sun,"¹³⁶ the great house of Bricriu is set with "carbuncles and other precious stones" that make the night like the day,¹³⁷ and Laeg visits a house lit by a candle that is "a bright precious stone."¹³⁸ The underground palace of the Christian wizard in Jerusalem Delivered is bright with gems:

¹³²Heidrek, p. 7.

¹³³Chrétien, pp. 34-35.

¹³⁴Hobbit, p. 226.

¹³⁵Cuchulain, p. 152.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 160.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 48.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 283.

Like stars in sky or lamps on stage that seem,
 The darkness there was day the night was gone:
 There sparkled (clothed in his azure beam)
 The heav'nly sapphire, there the hyacinth shone,
 The carbuncle there flam'd, the diamond sheen
 There glister'd bright, there smil'd the emerald green.¹³⁹

The Fairyland visited by Sir Orfeo is always bright,

For when it shuld be therk and night,
 The riche stones light gonne
 As bright as doth at none the sonne.¹⁴⁰

The silver coat of mail and the glowing precious stone are traditional marvelous objects, but their roots seem to be not in Old Norse or Old English, but in Irish fairy-tales and Arthurian romance, and there are parallels also in Tasso and in Sir Orfeo, a Middle English poem perhaps ultimately derived from a Celtic lai.¹⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The plot of the Smaug episode is borrowed from Beowulf and from the Norse accounts of Fafnir's death. The parts of the tale which have to do with a fierce but impersonal monster who flies, destroys, and guards treasure are borrowed from Beowulf: the stealing of the cup, the search for the thief, the night raid on the houses of men, and the steaming stone door. The parts which have to do with Smaug's personality and slaying, however, suggest Fafnir: the riddling conversation and the death-blow under the left shoulder. Details surrounding Smaug's death--the talking birds, the missing dragon-slayer, the cowardly town master, and the vast death throes--parallel several Norse sources as well as Gottfried's romance of Tristan. Smaug's physical appearance, though not necessarily unlike Fafnir's, owes

¹³⁹ Tasso, pp. 292-293.

¹⁴⁰ Sands, p. 195.

¹⁴¹ Sands, p. 185.

specific details to Middle English accounts of a dream of King Arthur, which is the only place surveyed in which a dragon is described with wings, claws, and armor. Smaug's weaponry includes all the fighting equipment of medieval dragons except poison, and in this respect he resembles again the dragon in Arthur's dream, though his taste for horse-flesh suggests Tristan. Imitating principally the Beowulf dragon, Fafnir, and the dragon in Arthur's dream, Tolkien seems to have drawn from many English and Continental sources to create Smaug, but Celtic echoes seem as slight in Tolkien's portrayal of the dragon as they are great in his portrayal of the elves. Though the contents of Smaug's hoard resemble the contents of Fafnir's and the Beowulf dragon's, two particular treasures which Bilbo takes from the cave, the mithril coat and the glowing gem, resemble treasures in Irish and Arthurian tales.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

The many parallels between The Hobbit and major works of medieval heroic literature indicate that these works are indeed among the roots from which Tolkien's fiction grew. As might be expected in view of his particular background, the largest number of close analogues to Tolkien's fiction are found in the heroic literature of England and Scandinavia, and the single story which most often suggests The Hobbit is Beowulf. Because Tolkien's most celebrated piece of criticism is his "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," and because he was for years Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, it is assumed that the many similarities between the greatest poem in Old English literature and Tolkien's first romance are not accidental. Old English vocabulary is the basis of many of Tolkien's invented names; the trolls, swords, rings, shrieks, and ruins in The Hobbit have their analogues in Beowulf, and the events surrounding the finding, angering, and slaying of Smaug are closely modeled on similar events in the Old English poem.

The group of stories in which Tolkien's fiction appears to be most deeply rooted is the Old Norse literature which draws like Beowulf, on pre-Christian traditions, the stories of the gods or of men who have dealings with gods and monsters. This includes The Poetic Edda, The Prose Edda, The Saga of the Volsungs, The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, and The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise. The names of dwarfs are derived directly from lists of names in the Eddas, and the characters of Odin and of other Norse gods seem to have influenced the characterization of Gandalf. Trolls, swords, rings,

riddle contests, shrieks, skin-changers, forests, elves, deserts, and treasure troves suggesting those in The Hobbit are all found in this great body of stories. The two sagas which most often suggest elements in Tolkien's fiction are those about the Volsungs and King Heidrek, and there can be little doubt that the author of The Hobbit is familiar with both of these, for he refers casually to the story of Sigurd in his essay "On Fairy-stories," and his son has edited and translated the Heidrek saga. The Saga of the Volsungs is clearly the second major source of the Smaug episode, and The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise includes a riddle contest which parallels Bilbo's in several ways and is, according to Tolkien's son, the only riddle contest in Old Norse literature. Further, it is the only one found in the literature surveyed for this study.

A few parallels have been found between The Hobbit and more realistic Norse narratives such as Snorri's Heimskringla, The Saga of Gisli, and The Saga of Gunnlaug, but the parallels are scarce, and the only very convincing source of anything in The Hobbit is the reference to a gruff freeholder named Bjorn early in Snorri's history.

The other works of medieval heroic literature in which parallels with The Hobbit have been found may be divided into four groups:

(1) Middle English romances, (2) Celtic literature, including Old Irish heroic lays and the tales in The Mabinogion, (3) Italian romantic epics, and (4) Arthurian tales, a category including works in an international tradition but written in Welsh, English, French, and German. The non-Arthurian English romances in which possible sources for elements in The Hobbit have been found are King Horn, Havelok the Dane, and Sir Orfeo, which include a magic ring, a person in a bag, and a fairy

hunt, respectively. The strongest argument for one of these work's having been imitated by Tolkien is the similarity between the hunt in Sir Orfeo and that in The Hobbit. It seems reasonable to expect Tolkien, the medieval scholar who published A Middle English Vocabulary, to have read these important Middle English romances.

There is no concrete evidence that Tolkien was familiar with the Old Irish stories of the Tuatha de Danaan, of the Fianna, and of Cuchulain, but such a familiarity is suggested by the many elements which these stories have in common with Tolkien's fiction. Underground houses, magical swords, and glowing jewels appear often in the Irish tales, and the evidence that Tolkien's elves are related to the Irish people of the Sidhe is overwhelming.

The Italian epics of Ariosto and Tasso contain many striking parallels with events in The Hobbit. Ariosto's Orlando Furioso is rich in similar marvelous elements--a wizard, a flying steed, a wolf-rider, and an underground journey--but the clearest analogue with Tolkien is the magic ring which causes invisibility and is acquired in circumstances much like those in which Bilbo acquires the One Ring. Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered resembles The Hobbit in its inclusions of wizards, a dark forest, a magical stream, an underground dwelling, a wasteland, and a dragon, but the most impressive parallels are those between the dark forest and Mirkwood and between the underground dwelling and the elf-king's palace. Again there is no concrete evidence that Tolkien was familiar with these works, so most of the similarities may be accidental, but the Italian accounts of the ring, the forest, and the cavern are enough like parts of The Hobbit to make Italian influence fairly probable.

The Arthurian literature surveyed includes Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Sir Launfal, The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlyle, Gottfried's Tristan, Wolfram's Parzival, The Alliterative Morte Arthure, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur. Gandalf resembles Malory's Merlin in many ways, but perhaps the resemblance is less than would be expected. In any case, a significant number of parallels between Arthurian tales and The Hobbit, along with references to Arthur in "On Fairy-stories," make the presence of Arthurian echoes in The Hobbit fairly certain. The more impressive suggestions of Tolkien's story in Arthurian fiction include the ring of invisibility in Chrétien's Yvain, Arthur's sword in Malory, the fairy mistress in Sir Launfal, and the dragons in Gottfried, Geoffrey, Malory, and The Alliterative Morte Arthure. Arthurian sources yield physical descriptions of dragons more like Smaug than any in the literature surveyed.

The world of The Hobbit includes pockets of Cuchulain's Ireland, Arthur's Britain, Ariosto's Europe, and Tasso's Jerusalem, but it is essentially the world of Norse heroic fiction and of Beowulf.

Appendix

Glossary of certain words and names in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings which seem to be derived from Old English or Old Norse.

aldor, OE ealdor elder, lord, king.

arkenstone, OE eorcnanstān precious stone.

arod, OE arod quick, bold, ready.

attercop, OE ātorcoppe spider.

azog, OE āsūgan to suck, drain, consume.

baldor, OE bealdor lord, hero.

balrog, OE bealu evil and wrēgan to arouse (Ryan), or ON bal fire and rök origin, wonder.

barazinbar, OE beoruh-synn-bær? mountain of guilt uncovered.

belegost, OE bealu-gost? dangerous or evil spirit.

bema, OE bēme trumpet.

beorn, OE beorn hero, man, bear.

bladorthin, OE blæd glory and orōian to long for.

bolg, OE belgan to swell with anger, belg bag.

borin, ON bora to bore holes in.

brand, OE brand brand, blade, torch.

brego, OE brego king, ruler.

brytta, OE brytta giver, prince.

celduin, OE cealdian to become cold.

ceorl, OE ceorl churl, layman, hero.

džagol, OE dīegol secret.

džor, OE džor brave, fierce.

dernhelm, OE dierne-helm secret or deceitful helmet.

dimholt, OE dimm-holt dark wood.
 dís, ON dís sister, goddess, angel, maid.
 dunharrow, OE dunn dark, hergað devastation.
 dūnhere, OE dūn-here mountain army.
 dunland, OE dunn-land brown land.
 dwalin, ON dvalinn to delay.
 dwarrowdelf, OE dweorg dwarf, delfan to burrow.
 dwimorberg, OE dwimor-beorg haunted mountain.
 dwimordene, OE dwimor-denu haunted valley, dale of illusion.
 dwimorlaik, OE dwimor-líc phantom body, haunted corpse.
 dwimmer-crafty, OE dwimor-cræftig knowing the craft of illusions.
 eastemnet, OE east-emnet eastern plain.
 edoras, OE eodoras courts, dwellings.
 ent, OE ent giant.
 entwash, OE ent-wæsc giant washing, "ent's" ablution.
 ēomer, OE ech-mære horse-famous.
 ēomund, OE ech-mund horse-guardian.
 ēoret, OE ēored (from ech-rād horse riding) troop of cavalry.
 eorl, OE eorl warrior, leader, nobleman.
 ēothain, OE ech-ðegn horse-retainer, horse-warrior.
 ēowyn, OE ech-wynn horse-joy.
 erkenbrand, OE eorcon-brand peerless blade.
 farin, OE farir to be in company with, journey.
 felarōf, OE fela-rōf very noble, full of renown.
 fengel, OE fengel lord, prince, king.
 fenmarch, OE fennearc marsh-border.
 flet, OE flett floor.

folca, OE folca of the nation.

folcwine, OE folc-wine friend of the nation.

folde, OE folde earth, ground, country, region.

frēa, OE frēa ruler, king, master, lord.

frēalāf, OE frēa-lāf mighty survivor.

frēawine, OE frēa-wine lord and friend.

frōr, ON frórin frozen.

frodo, OE frōd wise.

galion, OE galian to be wanton.

gālmōd, OE gālmōd wanton, licentious.

gamling, OE gamol aged.

gandalf, ON gand-ālf, OE galdor-ēlf magic elf.

gārulf, OE gār-wulf spear-wolf.

glamdring, ON glam-drengr? clash-hero, OE glæm-dreng? gleam-warrior.

glēowine, OE glf-wine merry friend, minstrel.

goldwine, OE goldwine liberal prince, king.

gorbag, OE gor dung.

gram, OE gram angry, fierce, ON gramr angry, king.

grayhame, OE grāghama grey-coated.

grima, OE grīma mask.

gror, ON grar grey, grey-haired, OE grorn sorrow.

gundabad, OE gund matter, pus, and ābīdan to abide, ābītan to gnaw, consume, or abēdan to compel, exact, force out.

guthwine, OE guðwine battle-friend, weapon.

haleth, OE hæleð hero, fighter.

hāma, OE hām home.

hamfast, OE hāmfast resident, settled in or owning a house.

harad, OE harað wood.
 hasufel, OE hasu-fell grey-hide.
 helm, OE helm protection, helmet, protector, guardian.
 herugrim, OE heorugrimm savage, sword-fierce.
 holdwine, OE hold-wine loyal friend.
 hornburg, OE horn-burg horn fortress.
 isen, OE īsen iron.
 isengard, OE īsen-geard iron enclosure, iron dwelling.
 isenmouthe, OE īsen-mūða iron mouth.
 langstrand, OE lang-strand long sea-shore.
 lathspell, OE lað-spell hated news.
 mark, OE mearc boundary, border, province.
 mathom, OE maðum treasure, gift.
 mearas, OE mearh horse.
 meduseld, OE meduseld mead-hall.
 michel delving, OE micel great and delfung digging, burrow.
 middle-earth, OE middangeard, ON miðgarðr, the world, earth.
 mordor, OE morðor murder, or mōr-deorc moor-dark (cf. myrcan mōr in Beowulf, l. 1405).
 mundburg, OE mund-burg protecting citadel.
 orc, OE orcnēas monsters.
 orthanc, OE orðanc intelligence, ingenuity, cunning.
 pūkel-men, OE pūcel goblin.
 radagast, OE rād wisdom and gast spirit, man.
 samwise, OE sāmwīs half-wise.
 saruman, OE searu-mann man of cunning.
 scatha, OE sceaða injurious person, thief, assassin, devil.

shadowfax, OE sceadu-feax shadow-haired.
 shelob, OE lobbe spider.
 smaug, OE smēocan to emit smoke or smugan to creep.
 smēagol, OE smēagan to penetrate, scrutinize.
 smial, OE smygel burrow.
 snaga, OE snaca snake.
 snowbourne, OE snāwburn snow-stream.
 starkhorn, OE stearc-horn mighty pinnacle.
 stybba, OE stybb stump.
 symbelmyne, OE simbel-myne always memory, evermind.
 thengel, OE ðengel prince, king, lord.
 thēoden, OE ðēoden chief, lord, prince, king.
 thēodred, OE ðēod-rād nation's counsel.
 thorin, ON ðoran courage.
 thrain, ON ðrai obstinacy.
 thrihyrne, OE ðrī-hyrne three-horn.
 uglūk, ON uggligr fearful.
 walda, OE wealdend leader, king, ruler.
 warg, OE wearg wolf, felon.
 westemnet, OE west-emnet western plain.
 wold, OE weald forest.
 wormtongue, OE wyrm-tunge serpent speech.
 woses, from OE wudwasa, ME wodwos wood trolls.

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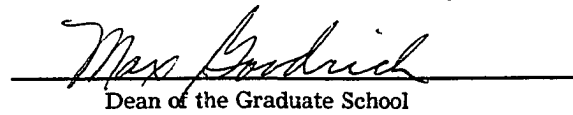
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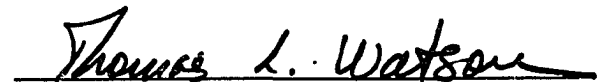

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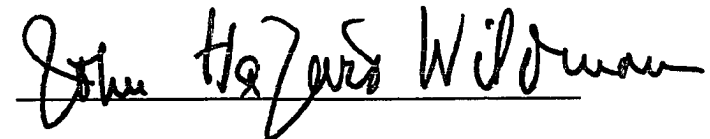

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